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HOUSE OF BONDAGE

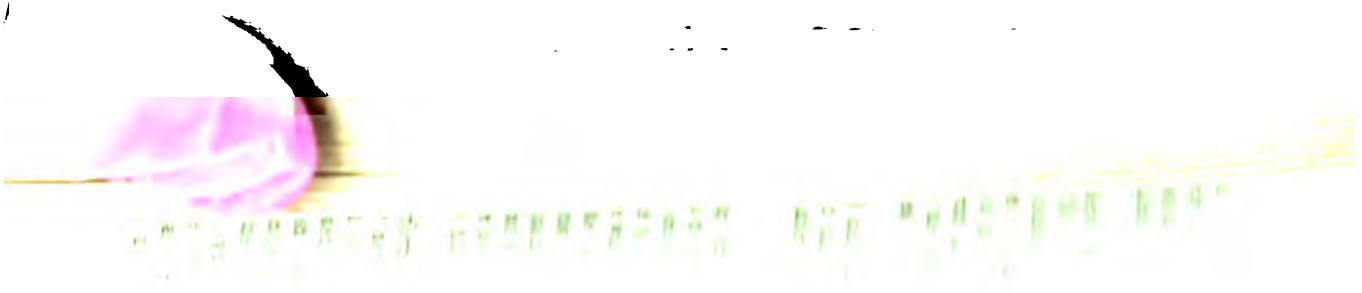
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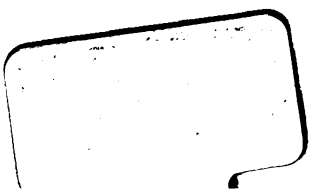





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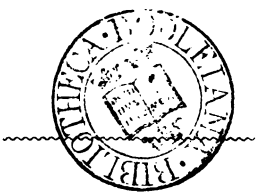
THE

HOUSE OF BONDAGE.

BY

EMMA JANE WORBOISE,

Author of "Husbands and Wives," "Nobly Born," "Our New House," "Mr. Montmorency's Money," &c., &c., &c.



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THE

HOUSE OF BONDAGE.

CHAPTER I.

ST. OSWALD'S.

It was the evening of the Dorcas Meeting, or the Sewing Party, or whatever it was called, at St. Oswald's Rectory.

St. Oswald's was a large, ugly, inconvenient brick edifice. It was built in the reign of George III., which in itself was a misfortune, since that era was marked chiefly by ugliness, obstinate ignorance, not to say pig-headedness, profound stupidity, and a general lack of common sense. Consequently, St. Oswald's Church, which must now be nearly a hundred years old, was, and is, an eyesore to all lovers of the beautiful. It was very nearly square, and you may judge of its size, when I tell you that it seated two thousand people. It had high pews, of course, of the orthodox cattle-pen genus, and the galleries were deep and low. The ceiling was flat, and from the centre thereof, in my childish days, depended a huge brass chandelier, holding, as far as I can remember, quite as many as forty or fifty mould candles, gas not having reached the suburb of the town which gloried in St. Oswald's. And in the winter evenings this chandelier was a delightful source of diversion to the children, and to the irreligious portion of the congregation. I forget whether it was during the chanting of the *Magnificat*, or during the reading of the first lesson, but it was at one regular period, that the stately, liveried beadle came up the middle aisle, snuffers

in hand. Then uprose all the poor people in the free seats, under and around the unwieldy candelabra, and the parochial magnate commenced operations, snuffing away tier above tier with considerable vigour and address, though occasionally—and that was, of course, a most charming interlude in the performance—he had the misfortune to snuff too severely, and put out one of the lights of the sanctuary. Then there was the bustle of the old women returning to their seats, and subsiding into their prayer-books; and this happened twice during the "saying" of evening prayers, though I believe the clergy used to *read* them in those benighted days. Also, there were smaller chandeliers, which lighted the galleries, and these, too, had to be lowered, and trimmed, and sent up again to their proper altitude by the salaried functionary of the church. The two "snuffing rounds," as they were called, were quite the event of the evening, except, indeed, when there was a funeral sermon, and the choir sang, "Vital spark of heavenly flame," or when, as once or twice happened, a bishop preached, and was paraded up the aisle by the churchwardens, who held their heads an inch or two higher in consequence.

The windows of St. Oswald's were large and many-paned, and they were generally very dirty, which was rather an advantage than otherwise, as dirt softens and subdues the solar rays almost as well as

> "Storied windows, richly dight,
> Casting a dim religious light,"

or as pressed or tinted glass set in heavy stone mullions. Still, there are objections to dirt, especially in churches. In George III.'s time no one ever thought of objecting to anything. The few who did object were Ishmaelites, revolutionists, Radicals, and infidels!

There was no stained deal or carved oak in St. Oswald's church; the pews, the pulpit, the reading-desk, and the clerk's tub were all of solemn, dark, indisputable mahogany; at least, the facings were; I cannot speak for the whole, though it is quite probable that so highly respectable and orthodox a people might have objected to veneering as frivolous, and have gone in for solid Honduras throughout, as more consistent with sound doctrine. To

sum up, however, lest to the present generation I be tedious, St. Oswald's was dull, capacious, and lugubrious inside, and commonplace outside; its orange-red bricks toned with age; but nothing could improve its silly little belfry, consisting of a tower or cupola like an exaggerated flour-dredger, and a bit of a steeple that might have been mistaken for a Brobdingnagian extinguisher. St. Oswald's —and alas, it was no solitary exception—was a case of unmitigated ugliness! What *did* possess architects and builders between the Tudor and the Victorian periods? Even Sir Christopher Wren's genius required a cathedral for its development.

The earliest annals of St. Oswald's, like those of Greece and Rome—not to mention Thebes and Etruria—are mythical, uncertain, and obscure. Its authentic records commence with the present century. About the year A.D. 1800 came—from nobody knows where—the Rev. Leo Bunn; and he had no sooner "read himself in," and preached a course of inaugural sermons, than all the world, that is to say, the Bradfield world, ran after him. He preached what were then called "rousing sermons;" they would be classed as "sensational" nowadays. He was a Boanerges, and "the wrath to come" was his darling theme. Most likely people wanted frightening about that time; the Georgian stupidity was no more conducive to spiritual than to artistic, or æsthetic, or even reasonable, every-day life. The world had gone to sleep, wrapped up in a mantle of comfortable self-appreciation, and curtained by the heavy folds of real old-fashioned Toryism. Of course it held to the Thirty-nine Articles; but it might have sworn to a fortieth, which should read, "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be." And to the Decalogue they might have added, Thou shalt not believe in any new thing. All unconsciously they had adopted the dogma of infallibility, and alterations, innovations, inventions, and so-called improvements were temptations and delusions of the Enemy.

There is no doubt that the Rev. Leo Bunn had his work to do, and did it. There was a certain brutality in the age which would only succumb to brute force, and Mr. Bunn, with his powerful voice, his undeniable eloquence, and his indomitable love of power, was just the

man to deal with the idiosyncrasies of his day and generation. As to his learning, it is doubtful if he had any; but then scholarship was not a characteristic of the age; and if he blundered now and then, his congregation would never know it, and were quite content to take things upon trust.

"Parson Bunn," he was commonly called in the town of Bradfield; Pope Bunn would have been more appropriate, though he would have been horrified at the appellation, for he set his face like a flint against Popery, and was frequent in denouncing the Man of Sin. The youth of St. Oswald's therefore grew up with a very hearty and uncompromising hatred of Romanism, and the elder people had a sort of gloomy satisfaction in predicting the rekindling of the fires of Smithfield whenever the small edge of Popery should be sufficiently driven into the constitution of the country.

Next to Popery they dreaded Dissent. They professed, of course, to be on amicable terms with their Dissenting brethren in the town, who were acknowledged to be *Christians*. But of course a very different kind of Christians from themselves—an inferior kind, who would have to be content with the lowest places in Heaven, as they were, for the most part, with the back slums of Bradfield for their own residences and for their places of worship. For these Dissenters stuck up for "religious and political liberty," which was just what the Bunnites could not approve of. Naturally *they* were free to worship God exactly as they pleased, and to exercise their political prerogatives in the way they chose—or rather as Parson Bunn chose; but that Dissenters should presume to think and speak for themselves, to claim to have a voice in the Senate, and to expect to stand on a level with Churchmen, why, it was monstrous. And, indeed, the Dissenters of Parson Bunn's day were on the whole a meek and much enduring people. They had been kept down so long that they had not any great desire for aggrandisement. They ate their humble-pie and said grace over it. Perhaps they thought they might have to return thanks over better things by-and-by—they might have banquets of their own in the time to come—who should say?

But they were a grand race, these sturdy, ill-bred, hemi-demi-semi-educated Nonconformists. They had fought hard for their rights; they had quit themselves like men in a righteous warfare; theirs was the heritage of endurance, and shame, and misrepresentation. They had long learned to be abased; and as for abounding, they had not begun to concern themselves about it, for the sun of their power and glory was as yet below the horizon. Still it was *dawn*. And the foremost men among them—the brave men who were patiently watching for the coming day—knew it, and they thanked God and took courage. They had fought and they had gained the victory—at least their fathers had won it for them—and they had only to hold it fast, and guard it as the apple of the eye; and that victory was toleration. But toleration is a very poor possession to have and to hold. It is scarcely a boon unless you are dreading extermination; it is the smallest and most graceless concession that can be made. Who cares to be tolerated? It is very hard to be grateful simply because one is not crushed; for toleration implies bare existence—it has nothing to do with growth, it is antagonistic to development.

So these Dissenters had set their heart on liberty; they wanted to expand; they wanted to break off their fetters; and who can blame them? They were tied and bound; they were repressed and scouted; they were hampered and hindered by a thousand restrictions, of which the thoughtless, flourishing Noncon. of to-day knows no more than the French princess knew of the realities of famine, when she advised the starving peasantry to eat pie-crust if they could not get bread. And the struggle for liberty was beginning, and in no town in England were the throes which herald a great movement to be more distinctly felt than in busy, smoky Bradfield.

And Parson Bunn and his flock were afraid of evil days to come; he prognosticated terrible judgments on the land if aught was surrendered, and the respectable sheep of his pasture groaned in spirit, and had awful visions of an invaded sheepfold; the strong and high enclosures broken down, and Dissenting goats boldly parading in their midst, while playful lambs capered and frisked away to the more inviting pastures where the kids did feed. And, worst of

all, some of them prophesied of a day when Episcopalian wool should be shorn by schismatic shearers, and Episcopalian sheep become mutton to be consumed by the ravening wolf of Nonconformity.

And yet the Dissenters had not dreamed of equality. Such a crisis had not even been contemplated by the most enthusiastic reformer as "disestablishment," the discussion of which has now become as "household words" among all classes of the community. Nevertheless, Pastor Bunn and his sheep looked askance at Dissent. It was a necessary evil, an evil of which some good had come—so much they granted—but still an evil, and as such to be shunned and descried by all the faithful. So the Bunnites learned two things pre-eminently—*viz.*, to hate and dread Roman Catholics, and to dislike and distrust, and, above all things, to *despise* Dissenters. They learned other things as well, some good and some bad things; but one thing they learned from Parson Bunn, and he deserves to be praised for having taught it to them—they learned *to be in earnest.*

He was in earnest, and they knew it. The Church of which he was an ordained priest had gone to sleep; it taught ethics and morals; it preached canon law, and it preached Seneca and Socrates, but it did not preach Christ. And the Rev. Leo Bunn did preach Christ—Christ the Redeemer, Christ the King of Glory, Christ the Exemplar. And no man who preaches Christ out of his very heart can fail of reaching other hearts, though the way in which he preached Christ I cannot commend, for there are more ways of preaching Christ than one. In some inscrutable way he made his people very much afraid of Christ; they trembled at the very thought of His appearing. A great darkness, an awful thunderstorm would smite their souls with sudden terror, lest the blackness and the tempest might usher in the coming of the Lord.

There are false Gods and false Christs whom men ignorantly worship; there is a Christian as well as a Pagan mythology.

I have seen a picture. I dare say you have often heard it described, but I have seen it—a wicked, monstrous, idolatrous picture! There are two ladders, up which

sinners are struggling to get into heaven. At the top of one ladder sits God the Son, with sullen, averted face, frowning down the unworthy ones who essay in vain to climb the stairs. At the top of the other sits the Virgin mother, sweetly smiling on those below, and stretching out her arms to help those who are painfully toiling upwards. It is only through her that sinners can come to Christ. He listens only when she intercedes.

It is blasphemous, is it not?

Now it strikes me that Protestants too often have drawn pictures scarcely less blasphemous. They separate God from Christ; they preach a God so cruel, so vindictive, so much to be feared, that it is impossible to love Him, impossible to long after Him, to aspire to Him, to desire to be with Him. And they preach Christ as the Reconciler between God and man, with this vast mistake, that they reverse the order of reconciliation; "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself," not Himself to the world; for He had never been at enmity with it, it was the world that was at enmity with Him. They teach Christ as a separate God, a more merciful God, a more pardoning God than the Almighty Father. And yet it is written in the Book, which they declare to be the only Divine revelation, "God so loved the world that He *gave* His only begotten Son," &c.

Still, all this and a great deal more, from which we involuntarily shrink, was better than downright, stupid, careless godlessness, for the worst of all gods that a man can serve is himself and his own lusts. For years Bradfield had heard no Gospel, except what the handful of Dissenters preached: it had been without food so long that it is not to be wondered at that it took eagerly the bread of life, however dry, and husky, and adulterated it became in the hands of those who broke it to them. They had gone to the old church, and to the new church, and to every other place of worship within reach, provided it had some sort of steeple and a bell; and they had had stones instead of bread given to them. Now Parson Bunn gave them veritable *bread*, and the hungry souls knew it, and prized it highly, albeit it was medicated with his pet dogmas; for there is a wide difference between starvation and food too strongly flavoured. If one be fasting, one

enjoys a meal, even if the seasoning be too powerful, only one is apt to suffer for it afterwards. Mere culinary seasoning troubles one for a few hours only, at the most for a day or two: spiritual seasoning, administered by a man like Parson Bunn, hurts one more or less to the very end of one's earthly life.

As the first and second decade of the nineteenth century passed, Parson Bunn grew and flourished. St. Oswald's filled to overflowing. To secure a pew, or even a single sitting, required interest. It was as difficult to get yourself comfortably settled in St. Oswald's Church, and to establish yourself therein, with books, book box, hassocks, and cushion, as to secure a Government appointment. Folks came from far and near to listen to this Midlandshire apostle; even Dissenters, it is reported, forsook their beloved conventicles for St. Oswald's. And the Rev. Leo grew elderly and more and more commanding in appearance. Whether he preached the Gospel in the truest sense must now be a moot point, but certain it is that his word was law. He reigned a king among the men of Bradfield, the autocrat of St. Oswald's, the lion of the pulpit. He earned his laurels, let none say he did not; and he wore them like a Cæsar.

But, as is commonly the case with men of his type, he did not progress. He was never, even in his most palmy days, in advance of the times; popular men never are. It is the men who live for the next, and succeeding generations, that are unpopular; they have to pay the price of their prescience and their precocity, to bear the brunt of present storms—their recompense is in the future. As Parson Bunn grew older, his *prestige* declined. The great world, as well as the Church, had begun to wake up, and it was daily making fresh discoveries, and the little world of Bradfield followed suit. The long stagnation of a century was over; things that had hitherto been without form and void suddenly grew into shape; the tide of progress had set in; the new day had arisen.

And Parson Bunn was gathered to his fathers, and St. Oswald's—nay, all Bradfield—mourned, for he had been a good man, a man of mark, and an earnest man, faithful to his convictions, and zealous according to his lights. And when he was dead and gone people wondered who would

fill his place. He was gone, but to a great extent his influence remained; for during his thirty years of ministration he had trained a whole generation in the way in which he believed they should go. He had formed as it were a church of his own, and the fruits of his teaching would be apparent long after he and the men and women whom he had taught had mouldered to dust. A monument was put up to his memory in the chancel, of course, and the Rev. Gilbert Grover reigned in his stead.

But no one ever dreamed of calling the new rector "Parson" Grover. Mr. Grover was quite a young man, not more than thirty years of age: he had the reputation of being the handsomest man in Bradfield, he had the whitest hands, he wore the finest diamond ring, his were all the flowers of rhetoric, and all the powers of eloquence; to crown the whole he was unmarried, and as far as could be ascertained a disengaged man; and it was not unreasonable to suppose that he would choose a partner from the ranks of his own congregation. St. Oswald's was fuller than ever, extremely to the astonishment and slightly to the disgust of the elderly sheep who had browsed so long and so contentedly in the Bunn pastures. Not only was every seat let, but there was no standing room in the aisles; even the pulpit stairs were appropriated, and a builder was commissioned carefully to examine the galleries, lest the overwhelming weight which they sustained should cause some dire catastrophe.

The male portion of the community did not, however, quite appreciate Mr. Grover; and the elderly ladies, the grave matrons at least, shook their heads, and said there was more sound than sense in the brilliant and flowing discourses of the new rector; but the young ladies and the confirmed spinsters went altogether crazy over him. They idolised him, they worshipped him; he was their demi-god, and they offered up at his shrine a strange *cultus* of smiles, tears, flatteries, netted purses, worked slippers, neatly hemmed cambric bands, book marks, and anonymous love-letters. It was astonishing how devout the young ladies of St. Oswald's grew; they came like flights of doves to the week-night service; they thronged to the Bible-class, they crowded the Sunday-school, they practised

with the choir by dozens. And more than ever they detested Papists, and scorned Dissenters.

You should have attended Divine service at St. Oswald's on Sunday evening. Then was Mr. Grover in the meridian of his glory, then were the fair maids of St. Oswald's in the seventh heaven of rapt and ecstatic contemplation. Their idol stood in the tall, dark mahogany pulpit, looking down like an amiable seraph on the listening crowds below. As soon as the text was given out the gas was lowered to the dim light of a shadowy cathedral. The monster chandelier had gone the way of its kind, together with the old organ, and the old clerk, and countless old people of the earlier days of the Bunn dispensation, who no longer slumbered in their pews, but in the churchyard outside, for the extramural law of burial was scarcely as yet in force.

But two wax candles burned brightly on either side the preacher, and you could see the glitter of his diamond ring, and watch the pose which was his favourite attitude, and you could behold him draw his snowy cambric handkerchief across his marble brow when lack of breath or exhaustion compelled a pause. But, oh! his perorations! Demosthenes himself could not have done better, supposing Demosthenes to have been the orator that histories say he was;—I very much doubt whether he was equal to John Bright. These perorations were things to be remembered. The Rev. Gilbert Grover became the fashion; even very worldly people went to hear him, and would willingly have "sat under him" had there been any accommodation for them. But the worldlings naturally got tired of standing, or sitting on hard benches in the aisles, or of being cramped up in narrow pews with their arms pinioned to their sides for want of elbow room. And St. Oswald's was badly ventilated, and, notwithstanding the lowering of the gas, used to become nearly hot enough to illustrate some of the rev. gentleman's figures of speech when he got into his favourite subject—the doom of unbelievers.

By-and-by, people were uncharitable enough to say that these perorations were very much alike; that when you had heard one, you had heard all. It was like listening to one everlasting tune with endless variations. Some-

how the hour-long sermons grew wearisome; a new church was built and opened, and drew away some of the St. Oswald's folk. A Dissenting minister lately settled in Bradfield became famous, and so degenerate were some of the flock that they actually strayed into Nonconformist pastures and stopped there. In vain Mr. Grover thundered out his denunciations; in vain he announced a course of sermons on Daniel and the Revelation; in vain he made his ecclesiastical toilet with redoubled care; in vain he scolded and pleaded and was pathetically resigned; his congregation thinned and thinned till it became with the churchwardens a question of lowering the pew-rents. For the handsome, eloquent, irresistible Gilbert Grover did not marry, and, as months and years rolled on, it was evident that he had devoted himself to perpetual celibacy. A young, handsome, well-beneficed, and unmarried clergyman is sure to be popular, and as a married man he may still retain and even increase his popularity if he only commit matrimony judiciously; but if he obstinately remain a celibate, sinking down into undeniable and confirmed bachelorhood, his fate is sealed; his popularity will melt away like morning clouds; it may even happen that his own curates contest with him and bear away the palm.

Still I do not think that marriage would have saved Mr. Grover's popularity. Any number of wives—in succession, of course, and selected from the flower of his congregation—would not have saved it. The secret of the man's failure lay in his want of earnestness and, worse still, in his insincerity. Parson Bunn, with all his faults, had been terribly in earnest and sincere to a fault, for he too often spoke the truth *not* in love. He had striven to be useful and popularity came; Mr. Grover strove to be popular, and popularity treated him as a coquette commonly treats her suitors. She allured him with her becks and smiles, and enthralled him with her charms; she made him believe that the game was in his own hands, and that he might pursue any course he liked; and, then, having sufficiently dazzled him, she betrayed him and, Delilah-like, left him in the cruel grasp of the Philistines.

Reports, too, of a defamatory character began to be afloat, and scandals were abroad. Those were penitential

days for St. Oswald's, and Ichabod was written on her portals. One by one the respectable families, the substantial folk, who had been of old the pillars of St. Oswald's, departed, and the Rev. Gilbert Grover found it no easy matter to elect churchwardens at Eastertide. Hitherto the churchwardens of St. Oswald's had been men of mark and men of wealth and position. It had been counted as an honour to serve. Now Mr. Grover was fain to content himself with a youthful grocer and a superannuated bankrupt gunstock maker.

And meanwhile there had been great changes in Bradfield. The Reform Bill had passed, and it sent members to Parliament; and a few years afterwards it became a corporate town. Churches and chapels multiplied, the genteel suburbs somehow were absorbed into the town; street after street sprang up; and the population doubled itself, and seemed not disinclined to go on and treble itself. So Bradfield came to be a place of importance, and a great political centre. Even had Pastor Bunn lived and flourished on he would no longer have been the pope he was; the day of little cliques was over. One voice might make itself audible above all others, but no one man could ever again be paramount in Bradfield. One wonders now how the select Streatham coterie could ever have ruled the literary world—tyrannised over it, in fact; and not less marvellous was the "Clapham Sect," the pulse of which was once the pulse of Evangelical Christendom. But

"Tempora mutantur."

Years rolled on, and St. Oswald's was only one among many churches: some High, some Low, some Broad, some *very* High—so High that a good push would have sent them toppling down the incline into the quagmire of Rome! Some *very* Low—so Low that they were *bonâ-fide* Dissenters, only the loaves and fishes, and the *status* of Episcopalianism kept them from open and undisguised secession. The Broad Church has never gone into extremes in Bradfield; it has not yet produced a provincial Colenso; not even a Maurice. Its rationalism is chiefly Dissenting in its character, and there is not much even of that. St. Oswald's became not only a unit in a long row of figures, but a very insignificant unit.

And the Rev. Gilbert Grover grew elderly, which he could not help; and stout, which, to some extent, was no fault of his; and lazy, which he could help, and didn't. His clerical brethren did not like him; they were apt to give him the cold shoulder. He grew more and more rotund in person, and his face, which had once combined the beauty of an Adonis with that of an Apollo, became (so people said) coarse, and apathetic, and sensual. Still, he was more pompous than ever; not even in the youth of his popularity had be borne himself so loftily, only now there was a large element of bathos in his useless self-assertion,—and of pathos also, for those who remembered him in the days of his glory were truly sorry for him. Only I am afraid more people laughed at him than pitied him: the bathos was always in the excess. And St. Oswald's was a desolation. It had a congregation still, because it stood now in the very heart of a thickly-populated neighbourhood, and a sprinkling of the old people, who loved the very bricks and mortar of the desolated sanctuary, remained; but it was nowhere, save in the local directory, among the churches of the town. It made no noise; it put forth no claim: people who had lived in Bradfield for years, church-going people, too, had never heard the sound of its little cracked bell, nor listened to the voice, loud enough, but alas! cracked also, of the quondam pulpit-orator,—Gilbert Grover.

But one day the little bell was heard to toll, as well as it could toll, poor little tinkling thing; and it tolled so long, and so dolefully, that the people in St. Oswald's Square—all workshops and manufactories now—began to ask who had departed this life; for funerals no longer took place in the crowded churchyard, and there could scarcely be any distinguished townsman in the congregation. One little percussion-cap maker, forsaking his perilous occupation, was curious enough to rush across to the church, to inquire for whom the bell tolled. In ten minutes' time, everybody within sound of the miserable little knell knew that the rector of St. Oswald's was dead. He had not preached on the previous Sunday, being indisposed. He had been poorly all Monday and Tuesday. but resisted his housekeeper's proposal of sending for medical advice, and now, on Wednesday morning, he was

dead! And his death preached a sermon which his life had never done.

Another interregnum! and so long a time elapsed that people began to think St. Oswald's was never to have another rector. At last came news that the living was presented, and, in due season, the ecclesiastical appointment was gazetted in all the ecclesiastical papers, from the *Guardian* downwards, even to the *Record*. The Rev. William Bethell, D.D., was preferred to the rectorship of St. Oswald's, Bradfield.

Who was he, and where did he come from? Was he young or old? High, Low, or Broad? Would he go in for choral services and intoning, or would he offer up extempore prayer before the sermon, and encourage "tea-fights"? Would he preach the "Real Presence," or would he denounce Baptismal Regeneration—although he proclaimed it *nolens volens* at the font? Would he clamour for Revision, would he extol Colenso and Maurice, the "Essays and Reviews," and "Ecce Homo"? Above all, would he hold his own, whatever might be his opinions, and restore poor humiliated, desponding, poverty-stricken St. Oswald's to her place among the churches of the Establishment?

CHAPTER II.

AFTER TEA.

I COME now to the tea-party, to which I invited you at the commencement of the first chapter. I only hope the tea has not grown cold while I have been giving you the early history of St. Oswald's, which it is quite essential you should know, if you care to understand the story I have to tell.

The Rev. Dr. Bethell had now been rector of St. Oswald's about three months, and already there were changes for the better. No sudden or violent changes, you must please to observe; for this man was a wise man, and knew better than to inaugurate his administration by abruptly and rashly overturning all the plans and arrangements of his predecessors—a mode of procedure which is sure to irritate and prejudice the minds of a community, however patent be the abuses which are remedied, however desirable be the novelties introduced. Excepting that his sermons were as unlike Parson Bunn's, and quite as unlike Mr. Grover's as sermons could be; and except that his manner towards his parishioners was entirely different from anything to which they had been accustomed, it would have seemed—giving only a cursory glance at affairs in general—that there were scarcely any alterations in the politics of St. Oswald's.

Dr. Bethell perceived at once that his people liked the old ruts. The remnant of Parson Bunn's people, or their immediate descendants, who had remained faithful to the beloved sanctuary, in spite of Mr. Grover's shortcomings and eccentricities, looked with horror upon innovations of any sort. They insisted on "soundness;" and when one considers how very mischievous *un*soundness is, one cannot blame them. But there are words—like some vowels—interchangeable at pleasure. Such words are orthodoxy

and heterodoxy, conversion and perversion, soundness and unsoundness, with others I need not enumerate; you have sense enough to select them for yourselves. And these excellent people—I do not use the term satirically, for many of them, though not all, were truly excellent, inasmuch as they walked blamelessly in the way which they believed in their inmost hearts to be the only way to heaven—these good people could not comprehend that anything with which they were unfamiliar could be by any possibility the right thing. And Dr. Bethell talked to them, both in the pulpit and out of it, as they had never been talked to before. They were startled, concerned, suspicious—in some cases frightened; and yet they could not, any man or woman of them, tell what was the matter with him, nor demonstrate that "he did not preach the Gospel"—a pet phrase of theirs, which they were very far from understanding.

The young people and the strangers were naturally delighted; the freshness and heartiness of the new dynasty pleased them, and they were promised plenty of work, whereat they rejoiced, for the earnestness of Parson Bunn had sown seeds of enthusiastic zeal, the results of which seemed yet indigenous to the soil, although the field had been so long trodden-down, and the growth of specious weeds encouraged. But the ancient folk shook their head and sighed, and spoke of the "errors of the day" in a tone which implied unutterable things; only that very few of them had any idea what those errors were. Some were of opinion that the doctor was that dark and dreaded thing, a Jesuit in disguise! others were sadly afraid that his tendencies were Atheistic, while others again pronounced him to be a Unitarian. In one way or other, there was every reason to fear that he was a wolf in sheep's clothing. No wonder that the elderly sheep, who knew what wolves were, should be scared and miserable.

Now let me introduce you to this wolf in borrowed fleeces. There he stands on his own hearth, his back to the fire, in true Englishman's style; his face to the company assembled—a party of ladies of all ages from seventeen to seventy, and thirty or thirty-five in number, exclusive of his own womankind, which consists of his wife and three daughters. He is the only representative

of the superior sex, excepting, however, his little boy, a charming young rogue in velvet knickerbockers, who has come in ostensibly to thread needles, and help hand the cake and bread-and-butter; "for," says gentle Mrs. Bethell, "I do like to see my children useful." And very useful Master Herbert is, for whenever the conversation gets into awkward nooks and corners, which it has a trick of doing in these feminine parliaments, he makes an excellent diversion. One can always say something to a child, or of a child, and so, for a moment at least, turn the current of thought, or of unlucky speech.

Well, there stands Dr. Bethell, leisurely stirring his tea; and the first words we hear him say are, "Mamma, give me some more sugar." The additional saccharine being obtained, he goes on stirring and tasting, and *thinking*, while all around him, except at his back, where the fire blazes and crackles right cheerily, goes on a buzz and clatter of small talk. He is just forty-five years of age; he is tall and well-made, not too stout, but undoubtedly in very good condition; he has fine features and a splendidly-shaped head; his hair is tolerably abundant, but iron grey, and his beard is almost silver grey. He does not affect moustaches of any fashion, so there is a limited region round about his mouth which, morning by morning, knows the razor and somebody's famous shaving cream. And well it is that he does so shave, for his mouth is a very remarkable one, full of character, and, as his wife believed, singularly beautiful. Look at it, I pray you, for you will not see a stronger and more resolute mouth between Bradfield and Constantinople. Not an obstinate mouth, a mouth with hard lines and long thin lips, but a wise, firm, thoughtful mouth, with rather full lips, which are singularly expressive, especially in repose. If you knew anything about mouths you would say, after contemplating Dr. Bethell's, that here is one of the kindest and most tender-hearted men of the day, and at the same time one of the bravest and most uncompromising; also a man whom you may trust, and to whose judgment you may very safely defer. His eyes are as noticeable as his mouth; they are grey, deep bluish, or sometimes greenish grey—a colour that, above all others, denotes power of thought, sincerity, and an intense humanity.

They are what might be called far-seeing eyes, and yet they are scarcely contemplative, and in no wise dreamy—they are too clear and too keen for that; but they seem often to be gazing straight on into the unseen distance, with a steady, dauntless, grave regard, which makes their owner look like a poet and a seer. And yet those deep, far-seeing eyes can flash with humour and beam with almost boyish merriment: I have seen them sparkling with fun, and I have seen them, too, brimming over with tenderness; I have seen them full of mischief, also I have seen them full of tears. For the Rev. William Bethell was sensitive and feeling as a woman—I mean the best sort of women, not a sentimental, namby-pamby, hysterical miss, who "weeps her little weep" on every possible occasion. And he appreciated good, wholesome fun and nonsense, as only a really good and great man can appreciate it; for it takes a great deal of sense to make *good* nonsense—the industrious brain's righteous holiday, and the lawful and healthy effervescence of a glad and thankful spirit: "*Les sots ne savant pas rire.*"

Dr. Bethell was a very clever man; there could be no manner of doubt about it. Also, he was a very good man, and as earnest as ever was Parson Bunn: only his earnestness took a very different form, and flowed in far deeper and in far wider channels. Lastly, I may say he was an undeniably handsome man, and of fine presence; but he was not handsome enough for a barber's block, and he never practised attitudes in the pulpit or out of it.

Mrs. Bethell was just the wife for him. They had married early, and had grown into each other as man and wife should grow, if they are to be truly and actually happy as a wedded pair. She was only one year younger than her husband; but her hair was snowy white, and she wore it in pretty short curls, under the simplest and most becoming of caps. Her complexion was still delicate, although perhaps the roses on her smooth round cheek were not quite as accurately defined as they once had been. Her smile was very sweet, her eyes dark and lustrous, her expression very pure and loving. She was just her husband's complement, and she seemed to belong so naturally to him, that people who knew them intimately could scarcely separate them in their thought. At the

same time she held her own opinions, and could state them very lucidly and in a reasonable point of view. She was essentially a reasoning and a reasonable woman, well-educated, self-controlled, and worthy to be loved. Also it came very soon to be bruited about, that she was unsurpassed as a housekeeper, and was such a manager as the Bradfield ladies had never encountered.

It was quite true. Margaret Bethell—Madge her husband called her, when he did not say "mamma"—was what the Americans designate "a woman of faculty," for she could do anything that she chose to do, and whatever she chose to do she invariably did well, thoroughness being a most distinctive feature in her character. Also she was very clear-sighted and remarkably unselfish, which I dare say was the secret of more than half her womanly perfections; for selfishness, especially in the mother of a family, obscures and deteriorates a host of virtues which, in the end, are stifled and killed by that hydra-headed monster.

The Bethells had six children, three sons and three daughters. Arthur, the eldest son, was at Cambridge; he was just one-and-twenty. Gertrude and Fanny were nineteen and seventeen. Walter, who was nearly fifteen, was at Rugby; Laura was eleven, and Herbert, the young gentleman in knickerbockers aforesaid, was only seven, and was still occasionally, to his immense disgust, called "Baby" by old nurse and by his sisters.

And all the while the buzz and hum of tongues went on, and the doctor quietly sipped his tea and *listened*. He had made up his mind to let people have their say that evening. He had resolved not to check the flow of chatter, unless, indeed, it swept into muddy and disturbed streams such as it behoved him to discourage. He had said to his wife that morning, when she told him that there would be rather an extensive gathering on this the occasion of their first Dorcas party, "I am glad to hear it, Madge, my dear; the more the better; our drawing-room is large enough. I want to meet my people in this friendly, unceremonious sort of way, for I want to know all about them; and, Madge, be sure and let them *talk*."

"They will be certain to do that, my dear. Forty women can do a great deal of talking—more, perhaps, than will suit your reverence."

"Forty women! Will there be so many? I am glad you will be there, my love, or else I am not sure that I should have the courage to take my tea with them."

And the doctor shrugged his shoulders apprehensively.

"There is no need for you to stay after tea unless you like it. I do not care for you to have too much to do with this sort of thing. You are supposed to have something more important in hand than listening to the clatter of forty petticoated creatures, your own wife included."

"My own wife never clatters, I am thankful to say. And, as a rule, I think a man, whether he be a clergyman or otherwise, is quite out of place at a sewing-meeting. And I shouldn't think the women like it."

"Ah, do they not! I do not know whether it is a case of *toujours perdrix;* but it is a fact that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred a whole heap of femininity will rejoice in even the smallest admixture of the masculine element. But when I see a man pottering among the flannels and the calicoes, I always think of Hercules and Omphale or of Sardanapalus."

"I am glad your comparisons are so classical; but seriously, Madge, I wish to be with you to-night for a purpose. I want to draw these ladies out; I wish to hear them talking to each other. By listening to them I shall learn more of my congregation and of my parish generally than by asking a thousand pertinent questions of my worthy churchwardens. I suppose Mrs. Lupin will be here?"

"Certainly. She is lady president of the society, and knows all about the work, which I do not. It strikes me that she is a very useful woman, and, as she dates back from the palmy days of Parson Bunn, she can tell you almost everything you want to know. She will be delighted to be questioned. The worst of it is, though I cannot greatly wonder, that she is so bitter against poor Mr. Grover. The Lupins stayed on under protest, you know, and out of pure love to old memories and—to them—sanctified associations."

"My dear, I respect the Lupins. They may not be very wise; but I am sure they are thoroughly conscientious people, and I will not—what shall I say?—*repress* Mrs. Lupin, if I can possibly help it. I would rather not hear

any more about Mr. Grover; but I want Mrs. Lupin and her coadjutors to talk freely. I must understand these people before I can get the key of their hearts and before I can do them any substantial good. And really, Madge, these St. Oswald's folk are unlike any I have met with or dealt with. They are a very peculiar people—so different from my London congregation, so different, indeed, from any people with whom I have had to do. They seem to me to have all the faults of Episcopalianism and all the faults of Dissent united in themselves; and their bigotry is something amazing."

"So is their ignorance."

"That is a matter of course. Ignorance is the very tap-root of bigotry. Well, my dear, you understand that these people are coming to *talk;* never mind the sewing for once in a way. And, Madge, give them some of your best cups of tea, and have lots of muffins and cakes. I have noticed that good tea—hot, and sweet, and strong—has the same effect upon women as champagne has upon men."

And very good tea it was! and it was not brought in on waiters and handed round, but made in the room; Mrs. Bethell at one table, and her daughters Gertrude and Fanny at another, round which as many of the guests as could gathered themselves; while little tables were brought from all parts of the house for the accommodation of the old ladies, who liked to take their tea cosily, and who reverenced their best silk gowns. Presently the doctor said, "What do you say, Mrs. Lupin? Are the ladies favourable? Are we to have a District Visiting Society?"

"The ladies will, most of them, be very happy to re-constitute themselves, doctor. You know we had district-visiting in Mr. Grover's early days; we were going to Christianise all Bradfield, I believe, when we commenced our work, but, like everything else, the visiting came to nothing for want of organisation. Ah! it was a shocking state of things. I used to say to Lupin, every Sunday night, 'Lupin, I can't stand it much longer; I must leave St. Oswald's!' And he would say, 'Where will you go, to the mass-house, or to the schism shop?' for the Popish cathedral and the Independent chapel are both handy, you know. Not that I would put my foot in either; God

forbid! 'Come out of her, my people, and touch not the unclean thing!' as dear Mr. Bunn used to say to us."

"I rather think St. Paul and St. John said it first," replied Mr. Bethell, with a curious smile on his lips; "or something very like it. But to do our work well, and to overwork nobody, we shall want quite a little army. I had no idea of the extent of my parish, till your good husband, Mrs. Lupin, showed me its boundaries on his map. And it is so thickly populated."

"And by such a class, too!" put in old Miss Wilkins, who could recal the advent of Parson Bunn. "Ah, I remember when all the gentry for miles round flocked to St. Oswald's; it was a beautiful sight—all the best families in all the best pews! And the church crammed to the doors! And you might have heard a pin drop towards the end of the sermon—the funeral sermons especially. Oh! they *were* solemn, Dr. Bethell. I have seen dozens of young people myself, all drowned in tears while they were singing—

"'When blooming youth is snatched away.'

And no one else has ever described the judgment-day as he did. Oh! it was grand, but very, very awful. There was no going to sleep under Parson Bunn's preaching; he always kept *death* before us—death, and the wrath to come."

"And I would rather keep *life* before you, Miss Wilkins; but we will speak of that another day. Yes," he said, musingly, as if to himself, "the life that our God has given us to live for Him here and for evermore—the life that knows no death."

A little murmur of assent and dissent ran through the room. It sounded very well, but Parson Bunn had never said anything like it, and so it *must* be "a new fangled" notion, and as such it could not be credited.

"There are the lists we drew up," said Mrs. Lupin, handing several sheets of foolscap to her pastor. "Here are the names of the ladies who have already promised to join us, and here are the names of some who we think might be induced to give themselves to so good a work."

"I must trust to you and to our friends here, Mrs. Lupin; I know as yet scarcely anything of our resources. Some

of the names I do know, but others, I am sorry to say, are still strange to me. The Bellamys? Oh, yes, I recollect — those pleasant people, lately settled at Bradfield. And Mrs. Carey-Jones? That is the widow lady from Little Ashton. And Miss Lane? That name I am pretty sure I have never heard, and most certainly I have not called on the lady. Who is Miss Lane?"

Then uprose a little chorus of voices, chief among which was Mrs. Jennings, whose husband was a wealthy electro-plate manufacturer. Mrs. Jennings was one of the "leading ladies" at St. Oswald's, and there was a little sprightly jealousy between her and Mrs. Lupin. "My dear Mrs. Lupin, what *could* make you put Miss Lane's name down in the list? You might just as well have put down the Queen, or the Duchess of Sutherland."

"Miss Lane is a *converted* person," interposed Miss Wilkins, with considerable emphasis.

"Well, I should say she was," said pretty Mrs. Cox, the japanner's young wife.

"She's not my notion of a converted person," whispered Maggie Aston, the beauty of St. Oswald's, and the best-dressed girl in Bradfield; only she wasn't really a girl, being over thirty years of age.

"Nor mine either," returned Lucy Alcott, Maggie's great friend and ally, to whom the whisper was addressed.

"No one visits the Lanes," said a comely widow close to Mrs. Bethell.

"Oh, dear, no! no one! No one ever thinks of such a thing!" cried Miss Phillips, a maiden well stricken in years, who classed herself with "the girls" of St. Oswald's. She spoke so eagerly that one would have thought she was afraid that somebody might visit the Lanes.

Dr. Bethell was amused. No one had answered his question; no one had told him who "the Lanes" were. Certainly they were people of importance, for the mention of their name had fluttered the whole community. Was Miss Lane a hawk or a kite that all these doves should begin to ruffle their plumage at hearing her spoken of?

"Was Miss Lane's father hung?" asked the doctor, with a spice of that humour that so bewildered his new congregation.

"Oh, dear, NO," exclaimed at least thirty voices, all

above concert pitch. "The Lanes are most respectable—*most* respectable!"

"Yes, *most respectable!*" echoed several ladies. And Mrs. Jennings asked, "What could make you think of such a dreadful thing, Dr. Bethell?"

"Well," returned the doctor, "you all seemed to say that visiting her was out of the question, and yet it could scarcely be on account of any impropriety in her own conduct, for Miss Wilkins says she is a converted person! So I could only imagine that her parents had in some way compromised her. Now, will some one tell me who the Lanes are, and why they are unvisitable?"

The ladies looked at each other, and Maggie Aston giggled. Miss Lane had once told her that giggling was one of her besetting sins. Then Mrs. Lupin took up her parable.

"The Lanes, doctor, are very respectable, and they live in that dull-looking old-fashioned house that stands back from the street—Poplar Street. It used to be the only house in the street, and it had an immense garden; but since the town has spread out so far, land has become valuable, and old Lane has built on it, or let it for building, and quite spoilt the neighbourhood."

"Old Lane being, I presume, Miss Lane's father?"

"Exactly! She is his only daughter, and will have all his money; and some do say he is very rich. If he is, more shame to him, say I, for he keeps house as if it were all he could do to make both ends meet. Sarah is not his only child, though; there is a son older than she is—Tom Lane, who used to be a great favourite hereabouts; but he married to displease his father, and clandestinely, too, and so the old man disinherited him. He left Bradfield years ago. He may be dead for aught we know, for his name is never mentioned at Salamanca House. The old man must be eighty, or more; but I have not seen him for the last five or six years. No one sees him, except just a few people on business."

"He is out of business, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes; he is past that sort of thing entirely, though it is rumoured that his faculties are as clear as ever. He is a most awful old man, there is no question about that, and Sarah Lane must have a hard life of it."

"She is not very young?"

"No, quite thirty. I shouldn't wonder if she were thirty-five; but she always seemed old. I remember her when she was a child, coming to church with her mother and her brother—there were only those two, Tom and Sarah. Poor dear Tom! Everybody was fond of Tom. He was a beautiful lad, curly-headed, and tall and slim, and oh! such lovely dark-blue eyes! I never saw anything like them. Not sky-blue, you know, doctor, but the colour of violets or pansies, and oh! such laughing eyes. And such a sweet-natured boy, too, so unlike Sarah; but Sarah is her father's own child. I wonder what is become of him? But I should not like to ask the only person who could tell me. Sarah Lane is fond of putting people down, and you can find nothing out from her face. Talk of the Man in the Iron Mask! I am sure she was born with one."

"Is Mrs. Lane still living?"

"No; she died a long while ago, when Sarah was quite a girl. She was a good woman, only very silent and gloomy. Some Christians *are* gloomy, you know, doctor."

"I cannot understand such an anomaly; but we will waive that subject, if you please. Tell me more about the Lanes."

"There is not much to tell; no one that I ever heard of knew old Lane as a young man. He was poor and made money, honestly and honourably, I should say, for I never heard to the contrary; and he is so much disliked, that if people could throw stones and dirt at him, they would. His wife was much younger than himself, and a lady—a real lady, people do say; Parson Bunn thought her a very devout person. And, poor thing, I hope she found some comfort in her religion, for I am sure she did not find much elsewhere. People said she had no affections. I am sure I don't know; but Sarah hasn't, that is a fact.

"What a peculiar person Miss Lane must be!"

"She *is* peculiar. She ought to be handsome, but she is not; she ought to be clever, but every now and then she confounds you with her ignorance; and she is bigoted in all her ways. She thinks the great end of life—religion of course excepted—is a clean kitchen dresser, and so

many wristbands stitched, and so much house-linen mended and put by. Bradfield is behind the age, I know; and I have heard it said that we, St. Oswald's folk, are behind all the rest of Bradfield. And certainly the Lanes, father and daughter, are very far behind their fellow parishioners. To talk to them is to go back into the middle of the last century. One would fancy they had been born and grown up then, and gone to sleep for fifty or seventy years, like the princess in the fairy tale. And now they have come awake, and do not know, or will not know, that the world has been going on post-haste all the time."

"I shall call on Miss Lane to-morrow, Mrs. Lupin."

"And the little dog will bark at you furiously, and you will hear a great thumping with a heavy stick upstairs, and a gruff voice calling over the bannisters, 'Who's there, Sally? who have you got there?' And Miss Lane will make you understand that she does not receive visitors."

"Nevertheless, I shall call, even though Cerberus growl at me; and I am not afraid of an old man with a stick."

Presently the party broke up, and there were great confabulations over supper tables that night. Sarah Lane, eating her bread and cheese in loneliness over the kitchen fire at Salamanca House, with Snap, the viciousest of mongrels, at her feet, little thought how she had been discussed at the Rectory working party, and little dreamed of the pastoral invasion of the morrow.

CHAPTER III.

AFTER SUPPER.

MISS LANE sat over the kitchen fire, simply because there was no other fire in the house over which to sit; and, though it had been a fine October day, the evening was uncomfortably cold, and the sitting-room, with its empty grate and its solitary candle, was enough to give one the horrors and the shivers both. In such matters Sarah Lane was a sensible young woman, and she went where warmth and light were to be obtained. Snap had not honoured the sitting-room—as the commoner of the two parlours was called—by his presence that day. Snap might be bad-tempered and vindictive; but he was an animal of great sagacity, and especially he knew how to make himself comfortable.

The young servant, who was sole domestic in that small household, went home to sleep; the house was generally free of her by seven or eight o'clock, and she entered on her daily duties each morning an hour or two before breakfast-time. She was only fourteen; but she knew her work, and did it remarkably well. She was naturally quick and active, and not more thoughtless than girls of her age generally are. She hated Snap. She was afraid of her master, whom she never saw, but whom she continually heard, and she had no great liking for her mistress.

"Whatever do you stay at old Lane's for?" asked one of her companions.

"I stay because it suits me," replied Rhoda. "It's respectable, though it's a hard place, and I said I'd stay in my first place two years whether I liked it or lumped it, if so be that they didn't starve me; and I do get plenty of victuals and good bits to bring home sometimes. Miss Lane ain't so bad when you come to know her. If you can put up with her temper, which is just as uncertain as the

weather, you may get along with her, for I do believe she means well—that is, generally. But there, I bepities her, I do, and I makes allowances for her; but it must be an awful thing to be the old 'un's daughter. It's from him she's got her jaw and her crabbed notions, I guess, for they say Mrs. Lane was quite the lady. And then she's an old maid, and never gets a bit of pleasure the week round. I wouldn't live altogether in that house, not if they'd pay me poun's and poun's o' money. I should die of dulness, and I couldn't stand the missis nagging at me the last thing of a night as well as the first thing of a morning. But Miss Lane *can* be pleasant. You'd be surprised to see how pleasant she can make herself when she chooses. I often think if she hadn't been old Lane's daughter, and if she hadn't been brought up in such a queer way, she might have been a very decent person to live with."

"I'm told old Lane is dreadful rich," said Kitty Carter, a young lady in flounces and in crinoline, and who worked in a pin manufactory. She rather despised Rhoda Clements for being only a servant. "They do say he keeps chests full of sovereigns, and bank-notes, and other vallyables in the house. Is it true?"

"I do not know," answered Rhoda, prudently. "I never see any money lying about, and the great chest on the landing is full of bed-linen and counterpanes not in use."

"Oh! the money would be in old Lane's room in a strong box under his bed. That's where misers and hard-fists keeps their money. Did you never see a box under his bed?"

"No, *never*," said Rhoda, shortly and promptly.

She did not tell Kitty that she seldom entered her master's room. Now and then she scoured it; but she had nothing to do but to scrub it, Miss Lane standing by or close at hand all the while, and the floor ready cleared for her operations. At such times old Lane hobbled into the spare room, and shut himself in, so that to Rhoda he remained a mysterious and invisible Mumbo Jumbo, personified by a heavy stick, a cough, and a growling, snarling voice. She did not like Kitty's questions, for Kitty's father did not enjoy an unblemished reputation. She was gathering up her sewing to go away when Kitty said, "She hasn't taught you her religion yet?"

"No," said Rhoda, changing at once, "and she won't neither. I begin to think what father says is true,—he belongs to the 'Free Thought Club,' you know,—and he says religion is all *humbug*—a cheat made up by parsons and old women to frighten people into subjection."

"May be," said Kitty, carelessly. "I care nought about religion; I never saw any good come of religion that I know of. But I thought Miss Lane was one of the very pious sort. Don't she go to St. Oswald's?"

Rhoda made a grimace.

"If that's pious, I'd rather not be pious; I'd rather keep as I am. A duller, more gloomier, more dismal woman than Miss Lane never lived; a convict couldn't look much more dissatisfied. When I went to Sunday-school, I learnt—

"'"'Tis religion that can give
Sweetest pleasures while we live.'

Now it don't give my missis any pleasure, and she goes in for tip-top religion, you see, so of course the hymn's all stuff."

"Perhaps her religion's of the wrong sort," returned Kitty, slowly. "There's bad shillings, and there's good, and there's dress pieces that wears, and them as won't wear; so perhaps there's religions worth having and religions that ain't."

"There's something in that. If there is a good sort of religion, one that will keep you right, and cheer you up when you're in trouble, and make you safe for heaven, I should like to get it. I wish I knew somebody as had it. Miss Lane ain't got it, that's certain."

"What's the good of bothering about religion?" asked Kitty, with a yawn. "Time enough for that when we're old, and can't enjoy ourselves any longer."

"But suppose we shouldn't live to be old?"

"Do hush up, you stupid girl; it's enough to make your flesh creep, talking like that. I want to enjoy myself."

"*And so do I*," said Rhoda to herself, as she walked quietly away. "I am certain sure God can't have made us all on purpose to be miserable. Why! I wouldn't make a mouse, if I could make a mouse, if I knew it would be a miserable little beast, and get killed by the cat at last. No, that I wouldn't! and God must at least be as kind-

hearted as I am. But then, says Miss Lane, we make ourselves miserable; it's our sinful natures, our—what does she call it?—our *innate depravity*, our wicked hearts. And we've got to get another nature, she says, and she's got it; but I don't think her renewed heart is as good as mine, that ain't renewed. I've a regard for people's feelings, and she haven't; she don't mind how she cuts you up when she's got her monkey on. Oh! I wish I knew how it really is; it's all a puzzle. There *must* be a right religion somewhere; there wouldn't be so many wrong ones if there wasn't a right one. I don't care to enjoy myself in Kitty's fashion, and know all the while that I shall be wretched some day. I want to enjoy myself now and for ever—yes, *for ever and ever!* What's the good of a forever if you're not to enjoy it? Oh, I do wish I knew all about it!"

And while Rhoda was thus exercised in her mind, her mistress sat in the desolate kitchen eating her bread and cheese, and drinking her mugfull of ale, and looking into the fire as if it were the book of fate, and she were reading it. The house was very still; now and then came faint sounds from the street in front, but they did not break the dead silence of the empty, fireless rooms. The old man was in bed, settled for the night; he had had his supper and his hot gin-and-water, and he had given the usual injunctions to his daughter to "make all fast," and not forget the shovel and tongs. For every door downstairs that had not a bell upon it, after being locked, and bolted, and double-locked, was further defended by a tea-tray or fire-irons set upright against it in such a position that they must inevitably clatter down at the touch of any uninstructed hand. Every night Salamanca House was put into a state of fortification; and not altogether without reason, for "old Lane" did keep more money and "vallyables" in the house than was at all prudent. He was more than eighty; how much more he did not know himself; he was a large, heavy man, but infirm in his legs, nearly blind, and chamber-ridden, if not bed-ridden, for it was now four years since he had last ascended the steep, creaking stairway of Salamanca House. But his faculties were unimpaired, and his hearing, spite of his great age, was preternaturally acute. And he was for ever haunted by the

fear of being robbed and murdered. Therefore the sharp-eared, loud-tongued little dog; the pokers, and tongs, and shovels, and tea-trays which did nightly sentinel duty; therefore the bells on the iron-lined shutters; the bars, the bolts, the locks; the survey of the premises from cellars to garrets which Miss Lane made regularly ere she retired to her maiden bower. The house was large and irregularly built; it ran back so far that a murder might easily have been perpetrated in the front parlour, of which the inhabitant of the back kitchen would be uncognisant, however fierce the struggle. The whole garrison consisted of one woman and one little dog, the old gentleman being clearly *hors de combat*, though always on the alert, and sleeping, as people say, with one eye open.

Sarah was a long time over her supper, which was rather an uncommon occurrence, for bolting food was one of her specialities; but somehow she did not feel inclined for bed; the fire was in a beautiful glow, the kitchen was warm and snug, and, like her handmaiden Rhoda, she was exercised in her mind. She sat there, a hard-featured, dark-eyed, dark-haired, discontented spinster. A scowl seemed to be the habitual expression of her countenance; her features were slightly irregular; her forehead was of that class which denotes intellect without judgment; her eyes were small, piercing, distrustful, and of no particular colour; her eyebrows were shaggy and ill-marked; her hair dark, and singularly abundant, but coarse; her mouth —oh, dear! her mouth was by no means the redeeming feature of her face. A phrenologist or a physiognomist would have said, "Here is a woman with certain undoubted though limited powers of mind, which have never been properly developed; a woman of strong impulses which have never received the right impetus; a woman of immense self-reliance and self-appreciation, of cramped ideas, of mistaken notions, of violent opinions, and yet of superstitious tendencies. But also a woman who, under less adverse training, might have been a useful, well-esteemed, tolerably gracious person." A lovable woman she never could have been, though she might have been loved, and wooed, and won in the ordinary way, had her tyrannical old father not guarded her from the approach of suitors till she had grown so grim, and sour, and austere of soul

and aspect, that no man in his senses would ever have thought of addressing her.

There was a time when Sarah had struggled against her destiny, and she had struggled pretty fiercely, too; but that was when she was five-and-twenty—ten years ago now; for Mrs. Lupin was right when she said Miss Lane must be full five-and-thirty. It was all over now. She had ceased to rebel—she was "tamed," her father said, as he chuckled at the thought of his success. And in a certain sense she was tamed. She had grown so accustomed to her life-long bondage that habit had become second nature, and she had come to accept the dreary, sordid, loveless monotony of her life as an inevitable necessity.

But that night life seemed drearier and more unbearable than ever. Would there never be any change? The flower of her youth had passed away. Such girlhood as she had had was over long, long ago. It seemed to Miss Lane, as she cast back a retrospective gaze, that she had never known what girlhood was. She had suddenly ceased to be a naughty, self-willed, chidden child, and become a gloomy, embittered, sullen woman.

"I wonder if I shall ever hear of Tom again," she said to herself, as she finished her frugal supper. "Dear me! he must be nearly forty-five years old! How long is it since he wrote home, I wonder? Let me see—it was just about the time that father built that row of houses on the old kitchen garden. That's twelve or thirteen years ago—more! it's nearly fifteen. How time does fly, to be sure! What's the matter, Snap? Lie still—never mind the cats! You're not going out to-night to hunt cats, so you may as well go to sleep. Bless me, what a fool Tom was! If my father had a soft place in his heart it was for 'the boy,' as he always called him, as if there were no more boys in the world. Why couldn't he be content, and submit himself to his parent? What did he want to get married for? I've done without being married, and am none the worse. Snap, do lie still! I suppose we all get a marrying fit once in our lives. We take the complaint just as we do measles and chicken-pox; but when it's once over it seldom comes again, and we're saved a lot of trouble."

"And yet," sighed Sarah, as she began to wash up her trifle of supper-things—it was her rule never to leave dirty

crocks till the morning—"and yet—I suppose there is some happiness in marriage, or so many people would not choose it." And she thought with a faint regret of a certain fair-haired, easy-tempered young bachelor, who had once been smitten by her curls and her rosy cheeks; for she *was* rosy at seventeen. But the powers that be were not propitious. Mr. Lane disliked any sort of change, and Sarah's marriage would have involved many changes, therefore it could not, must not be. And now the pleasant young man, who had sat three pews behind the Lanes at church, and was, besides, a near neighbour, had a comfortable, comely wife and half-a-dozen fine boys and girls, while Sarah was still a lonely spinster. She had long since ceased to care about Charlie Kemp—if, indeed, it could be said that she ever had cared for him—but somehow she hated the blooming, well-dressed, happy-looking Mrs. Kemp, and would never allow that she had any claim to the prettiness with which she was commonly accredited, and somehow the thought of "the might have beens" was uppermost in her mind that night.

When the supper-things were put away, she stirred up the still glowing coals, and sat down again. She opened the Bible, and read her usual portion, for Sarah's religion, such as it was, was a reality. When she had finished reading she commenced to meditate, and so lost was she in her own reflections that she sat till the fire died out to white ashes, and the long-unsnuffed tallow-dip burned down in the socket of the old battered iron candlestick; for of late years there had been no replenishing of household necessaries; and when things wore out, or were broken, they were not replaced. Consequently—except a pair of tall silver candlesticks, which never saw the light—there was not a serviceable candlestick in the establishment, and the one which Sarah had in use was probably as old as herself. The slide was in an infirm state—it had been mended again and again, and it had only lately been tinkered up. How effectually, what follows will show. The clock in the sitting-room suddenly—at least, it seemed suddenly, in the profound stillness—"warned" for eleven, and Miss Lane started from her reverie, and shook the little spider-legged table on which she leaned. Down went the candle-slide, and down dropped the last

atom of candle, and before Sarah could realise the fact that she had been sitting there more than an hour, the expiring dip flared up, and then she was in utter darkness.

A great horror came over her, as it very often did when she sat up late, and remembered that she had to go down into the cellar, and all over the great dreary house by herself; and she was very cold, too, for the thermometer had fallen many degrees since sunset, as it frequently does in the month of October. Moreover, the darkness scared her, and no wonder, for it was black, impenetrable darkness—a darkness that seemed palpable—that closed around her like heavy dungeon walls. The kitchen windows were closely shuttered, not a gleam came from the yawning grate. She was far from any living creature save Snap, and for the moment she forgot his presence. The wind moaned in the chimney, and shook the barred and bolted door, which opened into the yard. All else was still as death, and pretty nearly as cold; the kitchen felt like a vault, and it was dark enough for one. Sarah was chilled to the marrow, and shaken in her nerves, and her hands trembled, and her heart beat violently while she felt for the match-box, and tried to strike a light. Of course she struck half-a-dozen lucifers before she could get what she wanted. It seemed to her as if she had been hours in that horrible stifling darkness when at last she lighted another candle, and stuck it securely in the candlestick. She glanced round the kitchen apprehensively, but there was nothing to be seen, save the usual array of bright tins and polished brasses. Yet nothing wore its ordinary home-like aspect; the familiar warming-pan seemed like some grim spectre, the corners were full of awful shadows, the whole place was weird and eerie to Sarah's excited imagination.

With one quick glance at the fastenings, which she knew were all secure, she passed into the sitting-room, where the clock ticked horribly. Snap followed her, according to custom; he slept on the mat at the bottom of the stairs, and he knew perfectly well that bed-time had arrived at last.

She was just getting a little calmer, remembering how often she had had the horrors from sitting up late, and

how nothing ever came of them, and how foolish it all seemed when the daylight came again,—when Snap gave a deep, low growl, and sprang towards the door which led into the hall, barking furiously.

The door was closed!

Now, Sarah was quite certain that it was open when last she saw it. She invariably left it open when she sat in the kitchen at night, that she might hear if her father summoned her. Sometimes he shouted to her, sometimes he knocked with his stick, for there was no bell near his bed. She remembered, too, that she had caught her dress against the handle when she came down from her father's chamber with his supper-tray, and she had pushed the door wider, and moved further back the old "lead pincushion" which did duty as door-porter. And now the door was *shut*, and the lead pincushion was nowhere to be seen! Was this the work of earthly or unearthly hands? Sarah shuddered, she turned hot and cold by turns, she trembled so that she could hardly stand, and Snap tore and raved at the mysteriously-closed door. What was on the other side of that door? How dare she open it?

Another minute, and she heard her father's stick hard at work, and then her father's voice, uplifted to its highest pitch. Desperately she rushed at the door; it was bolted on the other side! She and Snap were prisoners at the back of the house. Again came her father's shriek—"Sally! Sally! I say! Sally, there's thieves in the house!" Then there was a confused sound overhead, the tramp of heavy feet, a scuffle, and a fall. Sarah had been paralysed, but now she became frantic. Oh, if she could only give an alarm! "Oh, God! oh, God!" she cried in her agony. Snap's fury was redoubled, but his shrill bark could hardly be heard outside the house, and they had no very near neighbours. Old Lane had not chosen to build up close to his own premises.

Suddenly Snap sprang to another door, the door of the china-pantry, very seldom used. And then Sarah remembered that in this pantry there was what they called a blind window, opening on to the stairs. It was very small, but she thought she might creep through it, for she was lithe and slender, and if only she could reach the alarm

bell which was close to this little window! It fastened inside, and it was papered over on the staircase side, and no one who did not know of it would guess that it was there. It was years since it was opened, for it seemed of no use in the world, and Sarah had often wondered what could be the good of it, and why it had been made. With every pulse and nerve throbbing, she went now into the pantry, and as quietly as possible moved away some china that was before the door or window—call it which you will—then with a sharp knife she cut noiselessly at the paper which concealed it. The hasp, the sole fastening, went so hard, that she slightly sprained her thumb in moving it; but at last the aperture was clear, and she shut the pantry door to keep Snap out, because, if he appeared on the scene of action, he could do no good, and would probably be killed at once, while his presence would warn the robbers of her own vicinity.

But at first it seemed as if her trouble were in vain; it was clearly impossible for her to get through the narrow opening; it was smaller than she thought; she might as well attempt to get into a bandbox. She wrung her hands in despair. Swiftly a thought came to her—the catch, a very simple one, which secured the alarm-bell, was *almost* within reach. Could she not with a broom-handle slip the bolt? A touch would do it, if only the touch were possible; and the bell once set going, would ring for ten or twenty minutes. It was a regular tocsin, and could not fail to rouse the whole neighbourhood, and to drive away the robbers, who would scarcely choose to await the arrival of the first policeman on the beat. And they could not stop the noise, for an army of men could not prevent that bell ringing itself down; it lived up high in a little pent-house of its own, on the south side of one of the tall chimneys.

But first, Sarah locked and bolted the sitting-room door on the inside—all old Lane's doors had strong fastenings on both sides, which was a good thing for his daughter, who did not care to be murdered in return for ringing the alarm-bell. She shut Snap in the kitchen, lest he should defeat her plan, then she seized a Turk's head broom, and poked and poked through the hole at the wall, where she knew the bell-catch was. She might have poked much

longer, and perhaps without success, had not a light suddenly appeared on the landing above; it flashed for an instant full upon the wall, and showed her what she wanted. Another second, and she heard the welcome snap and whizz, which told her that her work was done; the complex machinery of the bell was set in motion, and it would run itself down, and no number of burglars could hinder it. As she withdrew the broom, and hastily closed the wooden window, the bell began to ring; such a clang had not been heard in the neighbourhood of St. Oswald's since the great corn-warehouse was on fire!

There would be plenty of people to the rescue now. Meanwhile, Sarah heard curses and oaths both loud and deep.

The robbers came blundering and tumbling downstairs. They knew, of course, that their chance was over; that bell clanged faster and faster, and louder and louder, till to their guilty ears the sound filled all the sky. And it was not so late but that many persons would be still abroad, and the police would be on the alert. There was not a minute to lose. One of them, in passing, hurled a furious denunciation at Sarah, and gave the door a kick which would have shattered the panel, had it not been thick, and of well-seasoned oak. Sarah's heart stood still with terror, but the gang passed out of the front door, leaving it open behind them, and she knew that the danger was over.

Almost immediately afterward, Sarah heard the tramp of a policeman in the hall, and she called to him to release her from imprisonment. The door was soon unbolted, and, in the first moment of reaction, she felt much inclined to fall fainting into the arms of her deliverer; but that would never do; so she summoned up all her forces, and told the policeman what had happened. Then, still panting and holding her side, she ran upstairs to her father's room. As she expected, the old man lay upon the floor quite senseless, and, as she at first believed, quite dead. The room was in confusion—chairs overturned and boxes dragged from their places. But a glance showed Sarah that the real strong-box, which stood by the bed-side, was untouched, and in its place. Some blankets and a rug lay upon it, and it might have passed for an ordinary piece of

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] been [illegible]. The excitement and the shock had caused the seizure which had probably very quickly followed the attack. Dr. [illegible] the surgeon who had for years attended the [illegible]—a [illegible] St. Oswald's man—declared that the old gentleman was virtually murdered, for it was quite hopeless that he could recover, or even rally; in all probability a few days and nights would close the scene, and the victim would never recover consciousness.

Presently the house was cleared, save of the policemen, who were taking notes, and making a strict scrutiny of the premises, and of the two doctors and several serviceable women. Two discoveries were made—the men had apparently entered the house early in the evening, and had hid themselves up in an empty garret, which retained manifestation of their presence in the shape of sundry crusts of bread and crumbs of cheese, an almost emptied bottle of dark brown brandy, and a miserable candle-end, which the policemen pronounced to be a "farthing dick!" How and when they had got in Sarah could not imagine, but she understood now the source of poor Snap's uneasiness when she had suspected him of hankering after cats.

Also, it was determined that the whole crew had betaken themselves to the garden; they had very wisely eschewed the street, where they would be pretty sure to encounter the blue-coats, and other folk whom the deeply anathematised bell had called together. There were marks of hasty footsteps on the flower beds; some one had crashed through the Michaelmas daisies, which grew in

wild profusion on the south side of the house, and a giant sunflower lay prone upon the rudely trampled soil. But the garden was empty enough now; such visitors would soon scale walls; besides, it would be quite easy after the throng of people had arrived to mingle with the crowd under cover of the darkness. The very marauders themselves might have been present when poor Mr. Lane was lifted from the floor. The old man would never recover sufficiently to give evidence, and he was so blind that he could not have identified the person or persons who assaulted him; it seemed doubtful whether any sufficient clue to the robbery would ever be obtained.

"And now, miss, will you please say what you think they have taken?" said the inspector, bringing out his note-book again.

"Not much, I think," she replied. "The silver dessert-spoon used for my father's medicine is gone, and so is his watch, which hung here when I left him for the night."

"What sort of watch was it, Miss Lane?"

"A very large and curious watch, extremely old-fashioned. I should know it among a thousand, and Mr. Corrie could swear to it as well as I."

"You miss nothing else?"

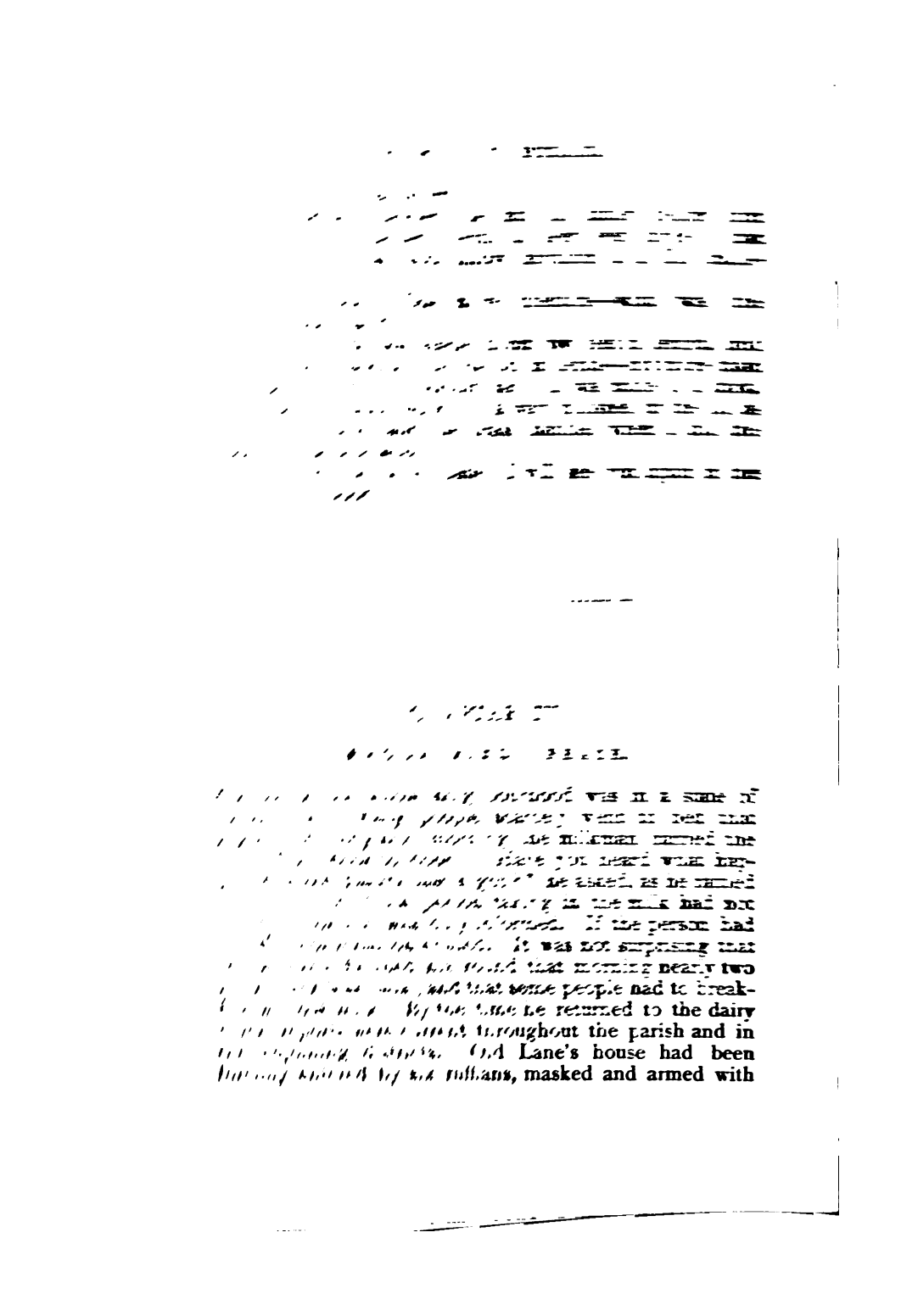
Sarah looked round the room; then she stooped down with the candle, and took a survey under the bed. She got up quickly, looking paler than ever. "Yes," she said, once more losing her breath; "there was a box under there: it is gone! It was not large and not heavy, and it had a strong brass handle on the lid, by which it was easily lifted. I have picked it up with one hand a thousand times, I should think."

"Do you know what was in it?"

"I do not. My father never opened it in my presence; but he always said it contained most important documents."

"Then you suppose there was not any money with the papers?"

"I cannot say. There *might* be notes, but I am sure there could be no coin, because the box was so light. My father always gave me to understand that the box held only deeds and papers of consequence. Perhaps Mr. Salisbury may know the contents."



throughout the parish and in
Old Lane's house had been
ruffians, masked and armed with

revolvers and bludgeons. The house had been stripped of all its valuables, and thousands of pounds in the shape of current coin of the realm, bank-notes, bonds, debentures, &c., carried away! Also, all the plate, except one German-silver mustard-spoon, and all Miss Lane's jewels. (Miss Lane would not have been much the loser if she had been despoiled of her ornaments, for her trinket-box contained only an infantile coral necklace, a gold and cornelian brooch, and a huge pictorial locket set in pinchbeck.) Some of these reports necessarily reached the Rectory, and Master Herbert, fresh from his nurse's hands, was the first to convey the tidings to his relatives. He waited till his parents and his sisters were in the breakfast-room, but he could not wait till prayers were over, because some one else would be sure to seize the honour and glory of telling the important news.

"Oh, stop! Don't ring for the servants, papa; I've something to tell you—something very serious," implored the young gentleman.

Dr. Bethell paused, with his fingers on the handle of the bell. "What is it, my boy? We are rather late this morning; will not your serious something wait?"

"No, papa, indeed it won't. You know I heard you all talking about old Lane last night?"

"You must say 'Mr. Lane,' Herbert. Yes, what about him?"

"He's dead! He's killed! Robbers got into his house and killed him till he died! Then they stole everything there was, even the door-mats and the pin cushions. Ann told nurse. And then they gagged Miss Lane, and tied her with cords on to the kitchen grate. I don't think there was any fire in it, though, they didn't say she was burned! But she was quite crazy when the policeman got in—she was gone clean off her head when they found her. And old Lane—I mean Mr. Lane—was lying in his bed with his throat cut, and his brains dashed out; and I think—but I am not sure—he was shot as well!"

"My boy, this horrible story cannot be true."

"Indeed it is, papa. I heard Ann tell it all to nurse, and nurse believed it; and Ann says all the town is ringing with it, and that detectives are coming down from London. How I should like to see a detective!"

"There must be some truth in it," said Mrs. Bethell, "though no doubt the affair has been grossly exaggerated. Still, something untoward has happened at Salamanca House, I should fear."

"Something has happened, certainly. Let us have prayers at once, my dear. I will go and see if I can be of any service to Miss Lane as soon as I have had a cup of coffee."

Before Dr. Bethell could set out, however, more veracious accounts had reached them. One of Mr. Lupin's workmen had been among the first upon the spot, and he had told his master the simple truth, which was certainly bad enough, for poor old Lane would never speak again. And Mr. Lupin at once came up to tell the rector.

When Dr. Bethell reached Salamanca House the door was opened to him by Rhoda, and he was struck with her bright, intelligent countenance. She could not be sure whether her mistress would see anybody except Mr. Salisbury. Mr. Salisbury had been sent for, but he lived out of town, and had not yet reached his office when the messenger got there. But she thought if Miss Lane saw anybody else it would be the parson, for of course she was in trouble, having as good as lost her father, and she must want some sort of comfort.

Rhoda evidently held to the opinion that it is the pastor's office to administer consolation to the afflicted sheep of his pasture. And she led the way along the hall, which was dark and narrow, and in the very middle of which was a step, contrived, as it would appear, for the express purpose of breaking people's limbs, since the stumbling-block might just as well have been omitted. It was said that old Lane was his own architect; and he probably was, since no architect in his senses could ever have designed Salamanca House, or any of the numerous eccentric tenements in its vicinity which Mr. Lane had built, economy being studied to the entire exclusion of convenience and good taste.

Dr. Bethell was shown into the best parlour. He thought he had never sat down in a sadder-looking, more depressing room. It was painfully neat, and it was really excessively clean, for Sarah Lane held strong doctrines respecting scrubbing and scouring. She was a veritable

Martha, for she not only considered drudgery to be highly meritorious, but dearly loved it. It was meat and drink to her. Though all her cleaning never made her rooms look fresh and bright, and no one ever gave her the credit she really deserved. The furniture of this lugubrious apartment was of dark heavy mahogany and horse-hair; a check-board table-cloth covered the pembroke table, and the window-curtains and carpet were drab, and faded drab into the bargain. There were no pictures on the walls, no ornaments of any account, no flowers, no sign of any of the countless small prettinesses which women as a rule like to gather round them. Also the room felt cold and unused, and the rector was fain to button his overcoat while he waited for Miss Lane. Presently Snap ran in and barked wildly, and showed his teeth so viciously, and dodged about so determinately between his legs, that he began to be seriously afraid for his calves. But Snap, unless outraged, rarely went beyond rending people's garments, and he now contented himself with tearing little strips from the hem of Dr. Bethell's trousers. Rhoda ran to the rescue. She drove the savage little beast away, remarking that she would drown him if she had her will. He wasn't fit to be in any decent house. Dr. Bethell thought nothing could be so good for Snap as summary immersion in the nearest pond. The first part of Mrs. Lupin's programme had come literally true; but there was no old man pounding away with a heavy stick and calling aloud for "Sally!" The old man and his stick had parted company at last, and his lips would never speak his daughter's name again, for every hour as it passed confirmed Mr. Corrie's dictum—Mr. Lane was quietly and rapidly dying. It was doubtful now whether he would outlive the day.

Sarah came at last, worn out with the shock of the last few hours, and with an utterly sleepless night. Her eyelids, too, were swollen with weeping, and her whole appearance was dejected and forlorn. And yet she met the rector's kindly greeting with a cold, suspicious gaze, and her voice was hard and rasping as ever as she told him that her father was no better.

"Is Mr. Lane's case quite hopeless, then?" asked Dr. Bethell, scarcely knowing what to say to this strange woman, who puzzled him as he was very rarely puzzled, for

he was one of those persons who have the gift of intuitively reading characters. "She looked more grumpy than gloomy, more angry than grieved," said the doctor afterwards in confidence to his wife; "and a more thoroughly ungracious person I have never in my life encountered. She evidently excludes common courtesy from the list of Christian virtues."

"He will not continue many hours," replied Sarah. "It is of no use your seeing him, he knows nobody."

"There is no telling how much or how little persons in his condition do know," replied the rector. "I will pray by him, and for him, if not with him, if you please."

She hesitated a moment, then she said, "Well, there can be no harm in that; but he is past the power of prayer. I think it my duty to tell you, Dr. Bethell, that my father is an unbeliever, an unconverted person. He has never experienced a saving change."

She spoke so harshly, so dogmatically, that Dr. Bethell felt repelled in spite of himself.

"Do you mean that he denies the faith?" he asked. "You say he is an unbeliever! Does he not believe in Christ, the Son of God?"

"He believes, or has believed, what is written in the gospels; he is not what the world calls an infidel; but he has never known a saving change."

"Can you be sure of that, Miss Lane? Is it safe to assert so much of any person?"

"'By their fruits ye shall know them.' I take Scripture for *my* standard," said Sarah, with gloomy emphasis.

"The same Scripture says, 'Judge not, and ye shall not be judged.' No one can read the soul of man save God Himself. Let us go to Mr. Lane."

It was quite true; the old man's life was gently, but swiftly ebbing away. Dr. Bethell looked on the hard-featured, ashen face. It was sordid no longer, for the majestic impress of death was stamped on every line of it; there was no appearance of suffering on the aged countenance, which was placid as a child's; the eyes were closed, the breathing faint and irregular. And was it indeed true that this man knew not and loved not the God to whose presence he was hastening? He knelt down on one side the bed, Sarah on the other. Rhoda listened outside the

door, and presently she knelt also. The rector prayed. "Merciful Father, who willest not the death of a sinner, who callest all to Thee, who lovest us every one with a love greater and fuller, and more pitiful than we can comprehend, look down upon this Thy child, and call him to Thyself. If, indeed, he have erred and strayed from Thy ways, if his hope has not been in Thee, if he has never loved Thee, because he has never known Thee—for to know Thee is to love Thee—oh, Thou great World-Father, speak to him now; let him hear Thy voice, let him feel Thy love, for though he has passed from our ministrations, he has not passed from Thee. He is still in Thy hand; Thou art still his Father, his Saviour. Thou *canst* redeem his soul, and we believe that Thou *wilt!* Perhaps, oh, Lord, he has never seen Thy face in the face of Jesus, if not, reveal Thyself to him *now*. His earthly vision is closed, but do Thou show him the cross of Christ, for every soul that is saved is saved by the atonement of the cross—that atonement which was virtually made before the world began, which can never through all time and through all space lose one atom of its mighty power. And bless us who remain, oh, Father. See! we come to Thee! we are Thy children, for Thou madest us; show us Thy love, and constrain us to love Thee more and more, and to serve Thee better as our days go on. Let us live to Thy glory, let our supremest thoughts ever turn to Thee, and ever rest in Thee, for Thou art the world's refuge and its sole safe resting-place. Oh, Jesus! God made manifest to sinners, hear us, save us, grant us Thy peace. And we thank Thee that in all our griefs and needs we may come to Thee, now and always. And we thank Thee for all Thy infinite love, and for the sure and certain hope of everlasting life which we find in THEE. Amen."

When they rose up Sarah's face was strangely softened She felt as if she had been with God, pleading with Him as a child pleads with its own father. And yet the God to whom her pastor spake so reverently, yet so lovingly, so confidently, was scarcely the God to whom she had prayed for the last fifteen years. Not at all the God whom she had set before her father when now and then she had thought it her duty "to deal faithfully" with him. Not at all the God she had preached to Rhoda, and to the

many young servants who had preceded her. And yet there was but one God—one living and true Lord! And her God was the God of the Bible; she was sure of that.

Sarah Lane would have been a happier and a better woman had she really assured herself of what she assumed as an undoubted fact, but what was really a foregone conclusion. Like many other people of the school to which she belonged she read the Bible according to a certain interpretation of her own, and she built up her creed upon isolated texts. She even, in good faith, quoted texts which had no existence. She held fast to the Athanasian creed, and she firmly professed the doctrine of the Eternal Trinity, as taught by the Established Church of England; but for all that, in her own mind, and in her teaching, she separated God the Father and God the Son, not only in their work, which is, indeed, in many respects distinct, but in their nature and in their thought towards mankind. She had once said to Rhoda, "'God out of Christ is a consuming fire.'"

"And what is He *in* Christ?" asked the girl, seriously.

"He is a merciful and forgiving Father."

Next day Rhoda came again. "Please, ma'am, I can't find that text you gave me yesterday, and father says there is no such text."

Sarah turned upon her little maid in anger, astonished at her presumption; but Rhoda, undaunted, went on. "How much kinder Jesus Christ must be than God! One might love *Him*, I fancy, but one never could love God."

Sarah exclaimed in horror. Rhoda's words sounded like blasphemy. "Hush, child!" she cried, "or some awful judgment will fall upon you where you stand. You *must* love God, or perish everlastingly."

"But if I can't make myself love Him, ma'am? I love some folks because I can't help it, and I'd do anything for them, and I'm sure if I get to know more about Jesus Christ I shall love Him. He do seem so very kind and patient-like—something like one's mother. But God made me, and I never wanted to be made, and He's so hard upon me that I *can't* love Him, and the hardest part of it all is that He will send me to hell for not doing what I can't do."

"Oh, child!" said Sarah, really anxious for the girl's soul, "it's God in Christ you want."

"Yes, ma'am, and I know that Christ is God. Will it do if I love Christ and try to please Him, and leave the other alone?"

"*What other?*"

"Why, Him you call *God*—the great God that is down upon us when we do anything wrong, and that serves us out like. If I could only get away from Him, and keep to Christ, I think I might do. Oh, I do wish I knew how it really is!"

"Rhoda, you can read the Bible—that contains all truth. That will teach you."

"The Bible muddles, ma'am; the more I read it the more muddled I am."

And Sarah went away horrified and grieved, little dreaming that she herself had done all the mischief, and so confused Rhoda by her expositions of Scripture that the girl had really mixed up God's Word and her mistress's word till she did not know which was which. And Sarah immediately sought out the text which Rhoda on the strength of her infidel father's authority had said was not in the Bible. Why, she knew where to turn to it as well as she knew where to find her Sunday bonnet! She turned at once to Heb. xii. 29.

She sat confounded!

She had read that passage a hundred times, and never noticed how it had been interpolated in her own mind. Her mother had always warned her that God *out of Christ* was a consuming fire, and Parson Bunn had said the same thing, so it must be true. Still, the words as she quoted them were *not* there. She felt vexed and humbled, and resolved not to speak to Rhoda again on the subject. But better feelings prevailed.

"I ought to tell the truth," she said to herself; so she went into the back kitchen, where Rhoda was washing up,—Bible in hand.

"See Rhoda," she said, "this is the text; I did not quote it quite literally, but *that is what it means.*"

Rhoda dried her hands, and read the passage carefully. Then she read the preceding verses, after which she was silent.

"Well, Rhoda?" said her mistress.

And then the girl burst out, "I do believe it's all right; there is no *other*. God and Christ is all *one*. God is in Christ, and Christ is in God, and there *is* no God out of Christ; *there can't be*. Didn't *He* say, 'I and My Father are one'? Oh! it's easy enough to love *Him*. So, please, ma'am, I'll stick to the God in Christ, because I feel sure He is the only true God, and I should be glad if you wouldn't tell me any more about your God, for I can't believe in Him, and I don't want to; I only get muddled when I think about Him."

"And her God doesn't do her one bit of good," said Rhoda to herself afterwards. "She's just as evil-tempered, and as selfish, and as full of her own conceits as the people that have no religion. But there, that's no concern of mine; if I take up with religion, and I think I must or I shall never be easy or settled, I must see that people don't say the same thing of me. But I do think I've found it out. She shan't worry me with her dreadful, unkind God any longer."

Nevertheless, Rhoda was still worried and perplexed, for Miss Lane would not let her alone, and the morning expositions were continued.

"The Bible's right enough," exclaimed the girl after one of these critical readings; "the Bible would be all right if she'd leave it alone, and not mince it, and hash it, and season it to her own taste." Rhoda was cutting up the cold mutton, which her mistress was about to hash for dinner; hence the culinary simile. And so the girl was exercised in her mind till she listened to Dr. Bethell's prayer. Then her joy was extreme. "I've found *Him*," she said to herself, the tears streaming down her cheeks; "I've found God; I asked Him to send me a teacher of His own, and here He is. Yes, this is the God of the Bible, the God in Christ, and that somehow is the same as Christ. I *can* love Him; I *do*, yes, I do, and I'll try with all my might to serve Him. That's just what I wanted—a great '*World Father*,' and yet a Father that is all my own, too, as much as if He hadn't another human child. Oh, what a good Father He is, and how He bears with one. I've been provoking, I know. But I'll try to do better, and Jesus will help me.

I wouldn't like to vex Him now I know He is my dear Father. Why, I feel as if chains had tumbled off me. I wonder if this is what the Methodists call 'getting peace'!"

And when Rhoda, girl-like, felt idle, and inclined to slight her work, she would say to herself, "Come now, Rhoda, that won't do! This is your work, and you must do it as well as you can, or your Father will not be pleased; and if you love Him, you *must* try to please Him. Perhaps you will have grander work to do some day; but while scouring, and washing-up, and dusting is your work, you must scour, and wash-up, and dust as a Christian should." Rhoda had never heard of "sweeping a room" for Christ's sake, and in His name, or she might have quoted Herbert's famous lines; but she had found out—or rather God had taught her, for without His help, His Divine Spirit, we cannot find out any truth—she had found out the secret clause which "*makes drudgery divine.*"

CHAPTER V.

HALF A MILLION OF MONEY.

OLD LANE lingered longer than was expected. He had a wonderful constitution, the doctors said, a most marvellous vitality: or, as the hired nurse who came to help Miss Lane declared, "such as he takes a lot of killing." The end came at last, however, just a week after the seizure, and he gradually ceased to breathe; so gradually that the exact moment of his departure could not be ascertained. And every day Dr. Bethell came and prayed with Sarah by the unconscious form, and Sarah did not like to discourage prayers of any sort, but she could not in the present instance see the use of them.

"He says much that is truly excellent," she remarked

to nurse Kettle, who was one of Parson Bunn's old flock; "but he is not sound, I am sure he is not."

"He doesn't preach the Gospel," said Mrs. Kettle, gravely, without thinking at all how terrible a charge she was bringing against the rector. "He's legal; he preaches up works and morality," continued Mrs. Kettle; "he's an Arminian, that's what he is!"

"I would not say he does not preach Christ," replied Sarah; "but he puts things so differently; he sets forth new lights; and I hate new lights, I love the old ways."

"And so do I, Miss Lane. I don't want nothing new, I'm too old. I only want to be sure as I'm *safe*—safe for heaven; but I'm such a sinner."

"The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," said Sarah, gently, and even sweetly for her.

"Don't I know it? Haven't I known it these fifty years? But I'll tell you the truth, Miss Lane—I'm seventy this day, and I'm afraid to die. I am afraid of God. I'm tired of this weary world, but I dread the next. What if I have never really repented? What if Christ's blood was shed not for me? God is a holy God, and He hates sin; and sin is in all I do, and say, and feel. Somehow I often feel as if I should be lost after all."

"You should pray for faith."

"So I do, but I never had much faith. I wasn't naturally hopeful, not as a child. I always looked on the dark side of things, it was 'my nature to,' as the hymn says. Oh, death is very awful, Miss Lane!" and she looked at the bed whereon lay the silent presence of one whose soul was even then winging its flight into the great for ever. And Sarah shuddered; she, too, feared death. Somehow, nearly all Parson Bunn's people did fear death, even as a criminal fears his executioner. Somehow he failed to teach them, or they failed to receive, the glorious truth that Christ through death has destroyed him who had the power of death, and so delivered them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

There are some who endure this bondage even to their last hour. It is strange that the child should fear to go to its Father's house, but so it is, and so it ever will be, while people set up creeds and dogmas and *isms* between the

soul and God. But the Lord knoweth them that are His, and when "our little systems" have had their day and ceased to be, we shall know, oh, our Father! that

> "They are but broken lights of Thee,
> And Thou, O Lord, art more than they."

Mr. Lane was buried by his wife, who had been in her grave for twenty years, and Miss Lane was left alone in Salamanca House. She was mistress now of all she surveyed; she was free at last; she might come and go as she chose; there was no one in the whole world who had the smallest right to control her or to dictate to her. But now that she had her liberty, her long-desired liberty, she could not enjoy it; it palled upon her. Her occupation was gone, and she found the slow, solitary hours hanging heavily upon her hands and mind.

She had resolved, as soon as ever the funeral was over, to have "a great cleaning," and then, if her income justified the expenditure, she thought she might have a little papering and painting done. She rather shrank from the idea of new furniture; besides, she was sure she could not afford it. A few modern things would make all the rest incongruous, and thorough refurnishing was not to be thought of. Sarah had been brought up with a most righteous horror of spending money; economy with her meant parsimony, thrift meant stinginess, living within her means meant living a long way within them, for she had a perfect passion for saving, without being at all certain what she was saving for.

After the funeral she sat down in the dismal front parlour with Mr. Corrie, Mr. Salisbury, and Dr. Bethell, to hear the contents of her father's will. It had been for years in the lawyer's possession; but Sarah knew that she was sole inheritor. Whenever her father was particularly pleased with her he told her that when he was gone "everything" would be hers. That was the sole way in which he ever showed his appreciation of her conduct; nothing like a caress, no interchange of affectionate words, ever passed between them; they even dispensed with the ordinary courtesies of life. On that fatal night Sarah had left the room without a word; she had not even said "Good night, father." It was not the custom of the Lanes to indulge in such salutations.

Yes, everything was left to Sarah—everything, without reserve—houses, lands, bonds, shares, all sorts of investments, money at the bank, money in the house, plate, jewels, valuables generally, and the household furniture. And the will was dated fifteen years back.

"How much do you suppose you inherit?" asked Mr. Salisbury, when he had finished the short but comprehensive and perfectly legal document.

"I should not be surprised to find that I had six or seven hundred a year. Close as my father was, I always knew he was a richer man then he professed to be. Once, indeed, he admitted that he was better off than anybody supposed. Don't hesitate to tell me the good news, Mr. Salisbury. I can bear the burden of £700 a year; it cannot be more. I shall not be disappointed if it be less."

"You may spend £700 a year on gloves and bootlaces, Miss Lane. You have half-a-million of money! At least I do not hesitate to say that, when all necessary forms are complied with, all expenses paid—even if we lawyers take the utmost pickings that the law allows—you will be mistress of a clear £250,000!"

Sarah turned deadly pale. The gentlemen thought she was going to faint. One seized the water-bottle, another a decanter of sherry and a wine-glass; the third flew to open the window. But Sarah quietly motioned them to be seated, drank a glass of wine, and recovered herself.

"Is there no mistake?" was the next question.

"None whatever. You must not be afraid. I must sincerely congratulate you, Miss Lane. You will be one of the richest single women in the country. But ——"

"Well? *But* ——"

"Your brother, Mr. Tom Lane?"

"I know nothing of him. I have no idea where he is. He chose to set his father's will at defiance. Though clearly warned of consequences, he persisted in pleasing himself. He left his father's roof declaring that he did not care a halfpenny for being disinherited, and—he was taken at his word! My father disinherited, and put me in his place. I, too, might have married, and gone my own way, but I knew my duty, and I did it. Tom reaps only what he has sown; and I am rewarded far beyond my expectations."

"But you would not exclude your brother from all share in the inheritance?"

"That is my own affair," she replied, haughtily. "At present I only remind you that he has excluded himself. Besides, I do not know where he is; in America or Australia probably. I know he *did* go abroad. And then he married a Frenchwoman. My father might have forgiven him had he not committed that crowning act of folly."

"Yes; he married a French lady, Fanny L'Estrange; but she was English bred, and as lovely and sweet a creature as ever breathed. She is dead, however; she had several children, of whom one only daughter survives. This girl, your niece, Leonora Lane, commonly called Nora Lane, lives with her father in a small town in the south of France."

"How do you know?"

"Because now and then Tom writes to me. Because, at your father's request, I have more than once sent him specified sums of money."

"You astonish me. My father has not mentioned Tom's name for—I cannot count how many years."

"Nevertheless, he thought of him, and, as I tell you, he instructed me to place certain sums to his son's account. The vouchers, and Mr. Tom's formal acknowledgments, are all in my hands; you can see them. But having once determined and declared what he would do, Mr. Lane was not one to go from his first word. Also, he had made certain promises to you, and he could not but keep them."

Late that evening, as Dr. Bethell sat alone in his library, Mr. Salisbury was announced.

"You'll wonder to see me to-night, Doctor," said the lawyer; "but I felt I must come and tell you. Isn't it a strange coincidence?—poor Tom Lane is dead! He died nearly a week before his father."

Dr. Bethell started up.

"You don't say so? And the child you spoke of?"

"It is she who writes. Here is her letter."

"Poor little thing! How old is she?"

"I do not know. She was poor Tom's youngest, and

the only one who survived infancy. From her letter I should say eleven or twelve years old."

"I should say several years older. But what will Miss Lane do?"

"That remains to be seen. I must go to her to-morrow morning, and do you call at Salamanca House in the course of the day. She cannot surely forsake her own flesh and blood; she cannot ignore the claims of this innocent, helpless child."

"And she will not. Miss Lane is better than she seems. There is the making of a grand, good woman in her, or rather there was; only a false education, and a miserable cramped theology has warped her better nature."

"I pity this child if she comes under Sarah Lane's iron rule."

"So do I. And yet it is only right that the child should find her home in the house of her nearest relative. It may do Sarah Lane good! who knows?"

"If poor Tom had not been disinherited, this Leonora would have been a fine rich heiress. Now, she is penniless. So runs the world away. I will tell you all about Tom Lane some day, Doctor; it is quite a story, I assure you."

CHAPTER VI.

THE CLERICAL BREAKFAST.

THE next morning was Saturday, and the Monthly Clerical Breakfast was held at St. Oswald's Rectory. The "clerical *déjeûner*" was a very simple affair, and had been begun on a very small scale, by two or three excellent men meeting together for friendly discourse and united prayer on the first Saturday morning in each month. It had come, however, to be an institution in Bradfield; the gentlemen met by turns at each other's houses, and curates, as well as rectors and incumbents, were welcome. You may be sure the curates never stayed away! But, like all other institutions of the kind, this breakfast—it was particularly requested that no one would call it a *déjeûner*—fell from its primitive simplicity and grew into a sort of local congress, in which, over coffee-cups and sundry relishes, all sorts of Church and State matters were discussed.

There had been a time when every clergyman in the town and its suburbs had made a point of attendance; but that was some years back, before the Establishment had got split up into divers sects and parties. The old-fashioned High-and-dry Church, and the moderate "Evangelicals" had got on very well together; even Parson Bunn—and he was certainly rather *ultra*—managed to be very friendly with Dr. Fogg, the stiff rector of Bradfield, at these meetings, though the Doctor stigmatised the Rev. Leo "as a mere ranter," and the Rev. Leo paid back the compliment by speaking of Dr. Fogg as one "who did not preach the truth." Now, however, there were twice as many churches in and about the town as in those old times, and thrice as many clergymen, and more than thrice as many opinions. The two churches in the old town—as the most ancient part of Bradfield was called—became, by degrees, strongly Ritual-

istic, and sundry new chapels-of-ease followed suit, and quickly outstripped the mother churches in the race. And every now and then a thin-faced, sing-song-voiced, long-coated curate clambered up so "high" that he lost his head, turned dizzy, and tumbled down into the quagmire of Rome. This state of things made the first break in the Saturday morning reunions; the High Church party, by degrees, withdrew themselves, and formed a solemn assembly of their own. The Evangelicals (so-called) soon followed their example; the conversation at these meetings had become extremely worldly, they averred; unorthodox opinions had been broached and entertained, and subjects of gravest moment had been too freely discussed. And so they got up a little mid-day gathering for themselves, where they quoted the *Record*, and bewailed the iniquities of the times with an unction peculiar to their class; and, what was very much more to the point, where there was no chance of anybody contradicting anybody, and where anything like actual controversy would be sure to be discouraged. Nevertheless, as the Low Church party held its meetings on the last Tuesday in the month, a few—a very few—of its members occasionally honoured the "Clerical Breakfast," as it was still called, with their presence, and meekly drank unorthodox cups of tea or coffee, and patiently ate heretical eggs and ham, and savoury meats, and crisp, unhallowed muffins, while they listened to polemical discourse, and shuddered at unsound doctrine.

This, of course, was Dr. Bethell's first "breakfast," and it was very well attended. The rector of the parish, Dr. Burrowes—Dr. Fogg's successor—was present, also nine or ten incumbents, and a very good muster of curates, young and old; and several unbeneficed clergymen residing in the neighbourhood, and doing occasional "duty" for their working brethren. And it was already pretty well known in the town that the rector of St. Oswald's kept an excellent table, and that Mrs. Bethell was the very queen of housewives. Many people had wondered why Dr. Bethell had come to Bradfield, for the living of St. Oswald's, at its best, could not be a very lucrative one, and he had not changed for the better as regarded the temporalities. But the fact was, he had wanted more work; his London congre-

gation was small and select and wealthy, and he thought he had a message for the "common people" and for the multitude. He might have had an East-end perpetual curacy, but the district was unhealthy, except those fully acclimatised; and what he would have risked for himself, he dare not risk for his wife and children. And then St. Oswald's was offered him as a large neglected parish, in a large democratic manufacturing town, where all the forces of evil were actively at work, and where an earnest, outspoken Christian ministry was greatly needed. And already the Doctor found his hands were fuller than they would hold, and he was contemplating adding another curate to his staff.

That morning several of the "Evangelicals" were present. I call them so because they had given themselves that distinctive name, and they went by it; though Evangelical in a literal and true sense they were *not*, for their Evangel was chiefly made up of Scripture truths—*confectionés*, as the French say—to suit their own ideas; but that it was "God's spell" and the Christ's "good news" I never could believe. Of this party was the Rev. Charles Pettifer, who just now rode his high horse, because his miserable little Episcopal chapel had been turned into a district church; and he, from a mere salaried chaplain, liable to be dismissed at any moment by trustees, had blossomed out into a regularly constituted incumbent. And he was—who shall blame him for it? clergymanity is but poor humanity, after all—very proud of his new incumbency, and exasperatingly self-conscious. A very naughty and graceless young lady who attended the ministrations of Mr. Pettifer had been heard to remark that her pastor had now set up in business for himself, and had ceased to be a journeyman, having become a master-man. And this remark coming to the pastor's ears, filled him with bitterness, and was as gall and wormwood to his soul; for in the days of his youth he had wrought with his hands in the sweat of his brow, and now he was heartily ashamed of the circumstance—his own shame being really the only shameful ingredient of the whole fact; for humble beginnings, if they be only honest ones, are rather a glory than a shame.

Mr. Pettifer came in late, and looked rather excited.

He brought news, surprising news, which had come to him on his way.

"Of course you have heard of the loss our Dissenting friends have sustained?" he asked, with his mouth full of grilled chicken. He always called Dissenters "friends" and "brethren;" but he nursed a secret enmity against them, nevertheless, especially against the most popular. It was rumoured in the town that he had once been not only a mechanic, but a Dissenter! Of course, that was only a wicked slander—people will say such spiteful things; alas, for poor human nature!

"No, indeed!" said several voices at once.

"Has Carvary Cathedral tumbled down, or been burnt down in the night?" squeaked a very little curate, who was indulging quite greedily in buttered toast and anchovy-paste.

Now, Carvary Cathedral was really "Carvary Congregational Church," once called, and still called by the old stagers, *Carvary Chapel*, because it was situated in Carvary Street—once an obscure and disreputable *cul-de-sac*, or blind-alley, but now a wide and handsome thoroughfare in the centre of the town. Generally speaking, people were said to "worship at Carvary," or to be "members of Carvary," but on the board in front of the building you might read "*Carvary Congregational Church.*" The term cathedral was chiefly used—though not always unkindly—in derision, because it was very spacious, and had cost a great deal of money, and because it was one of the chief strongholds of Nonconformity—nay, the very chiefest in all Midlandshire, to say nothing of Coalshire, Hillshire, and other shires contiguous. And the little curate meant no disrespect when he alluded to the cathedral; he had a kind, big heart, in spite of his small body and his squeaky voice, as all the poor women and children in his miserable parish could testify.

But Mr. Pettifer took up the cue in his own spirit. "Cathedral! ah! ah! No; the cathedral is all right enough, as far as the building goes; but its bishop hath departed this life somewhat incontinently!"

He had no idea that he had described the deceased pastor so accurately—that, in the New Testament sense of the word, he had been a veritable *bishop*.

There was a moment's silence, and the business of eating and drinking was suspended. The Bishop of Carvary was no ordinary person, and Mr. Pettifer's light tone jarred upon the feelings of all present. Then uprose a chorus of voices, alike hushed and eager:

"No! no! it cannot be!"

"Surely not!"

"Why, he preached only last Sunday!"

But Dr. Burrowes, pale and almost stern, turned round to Mr. Pettifer and said: "Tell me, sir, I beg you, how these sad tidings reached you? Pray God it is but town's talk—a mere report!"

Mr. Pettifer looked grave immediately; though why the rector of Bradfield should so greatly concern himself about the death of an aged Dissenting minister he could not imagine.

He replied: "I heard men speaking of it in the streets; it was talked of in the omnibus. One of Mr. Grey's near neighbours was among the passengers, and *he*, when appealed to, said the old man had died at five o'clock this morning, for he had sent to inquire."

"Then I am afraid it is true," said Dr. Burrowes, covering his face with his hands. "Oh, my dear old friend—my father!"

Just then Dr. Bethell's servant, Cobb, who was waiting at the sideboard, approached his master's side and whispered in his ear.

Presently the Doctor spoke. "My man says he thinks it is true. Several of the tradespeople, coming in as usual, have brought the news."

"The town is ringing with it, sir," said Cobb, respectfully. "Mr. Grey must have been thought a deal of."

"He was! he was!" broke in Dr. Burrowes, impulsively. "But not a whit more than he deserved! Never was man more honoured of God than he! I wish I had done half as much for my Master as he has."

"Still he was *unauthorised*, you know!" said Mr. Pettifer, with the supercilious curl of lip that had grown to be so natural. "He was not in orders."

"Unauthorised? Yes, Mr. Pettifer, if you count the authority of the Holy Ghost as nothing," said Dr. Burrowes, gravely.

But Dr. Bethell spoke out. "Orders, sir! orders! I wish to God that my own credentials were as infallible as his! Why, sir, this man, by his preached and his written word, has brought unnumbered souls to God! He, in his Master's name, has turned many to righteousness, and he will shine as the stars for ever and ever. He had God's orders—Christ's orders! He could afford to let the others go. His polity was not our polity; and think you we have a monopoly of truth? Can we doubt his commission? Dare we unchurch one so honoured of the Lord?" Mr. Pettifer sat in silent astonishment. As he said afterwards to his meek wife, "It is more than I can understand, more than I can understand!"

All the rest of the conversation was upon this subject. Fifty years ago, and more, the Rev. John Grey had come to the town to be the pastor of "the church worshipping in Carvary Street, Bradfield." He had been "acceptable" from the very first, and he had always ministered to a grateful and devoted people. He did a great work in the town; and as time elapsed, his influence began to be acknowledged throughout the denomination, which was just beginning to feel its own power and responsibility. He and Parson Bunn were contemporaries, and, to some extent, friends. But Parson Bunn, then in his meridian, was bigoted in the extreme, and Dissent got from him many a covert sneer, and many a sly thrust in the dark. Perhaps, too, Mr. Grey was not quite as catholic in his younger days as in those of his maturer age; young men, especially public young men, always say many things which the experience of after years will not endorse, and it is not fair to give a man of fifty or sixty the full benefit of all his rash speeches uttered when he was under thirty. Without surrendering any real or vital principle, a man may come to be so unlike his former self, as to seem to be quite another person to those who have not known him during the interval. And I dare say John Grey, with his strong, ardent spirit, his sense of power, and his passionate attachment to what he deemed to be the truth, may often have spoken unadvisedly with his tongue. Certain it is, that while the two ministers kept up a sort of friendship or alliance, and began to meet on platforms—it was a great concession in those days for a Church clergyman to

meet in public a Dissenting minister, and Parson Bunn always improved the occasion with that mingled grace and arrogance for which he was so famous—there was a good deal of active hostility between them, and they had many a tilt, the report of which was somehow spread abroad among their congregations, who took intense pleasure in retailing—doubtless with additions and variations—the witty speeches and trenchant rejoinders of their respective pastors.

Parson Bunn, however, grew quieter as he grew older; let us hope he became more generous. But he was not the kind of man to mellow with age. There are some fruits that never ripen—they are hard and acid to the last, till they shrivel up and decay. And so there are some natures whom age neither ripens nor sweetens, who are harsh and stern and unyielding to the end; and of such was Parson Bunn. But when he died, John Grey sorely missed him, and deeply deplored his loss, though very soon after his death he became himself the leading man in the religious circles at Bradfield. And he, too, began to grow old, and God crowned his labours with wonderful success. His church waxed strong, and it was a praying church, a working church; and it was as leaven in the great, godless town of Bradfield. The schools of Carvary were quoted everywhere; its adult classes, its benevolent meetings, its various societies prospered; it had town missionaries of its own, and mission churches in divers low neighbourhoods. In short, it was a mighty confederation—strong, active, and united in Christian love and good works, and in reverential affection for the pastor, whose name was honoured on both sides of the sea.

And again the years went on, and John Grey had accomplished his threescore years and ten. He was the patriarch of Bradfield; younger ministers—and not those alone of his own denomination—bent before him; every head was uncovered to his white hairs. Even the men who conscientiously hated Nonconformity, and on principle held themselves aloof from Nonconformists, spoke of him gently and kindly. Mistaken though he was in their estimation—a schismatic, a heretic!—they knew that he loved his Lord, and worked zealously for His glory. And so it came to pass that in the last years of

John Grey's life, that was accomplished which was written of aforetime—"When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh his enemies to be at peace with him."

Dr. Burrowes and he were dear and close friends. There were certain points on which they differed; certain principles which neither could yield; but in the love of the Lord Jesus, and in the spread of His truth, they were as one. They prayed together, they took sweet counsel together, their souls were knit together, and Bradfield felt the hallowed influence of that blessed catholic companionship. By-and-by it was whispered that the dear old man's health was declining, that the time was coming when he would no more go in and out among his people. At first his brethren helped him; then it became necessary to secure the services of a regularly appointed assistant minister; and after a while this young man's face was oftener to be seen in the pulpit than that of the aged pastor, who had now completed his seventy-fifth year.

Still, his people hoped, his friends of the Episcopal Church hoped, all Bradfield hoped, that for yet a little while longer his presence would be with them, for he was not actually laid aside, though he suffered from the ravages of disease, and from general debility. But it was not to be; his work was done, his toils were ended, his sheaves were gathered in, and it was meet that he should enter into rest. And so his Master called him. He preached his last sermon, and hundreds hung upon his words, little dreaming that they would listen to his voice no more. And his theme was *Salvation!*—the great, the common salvation which he had preached with all his energies for more than half a century.

"My work is done," he said that night to one who loved him well: "'Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word.'" Gently as fades the summer rose, softly as dies the radiant evening gleam, he passed away. He did not die; only the worn-out mortal frame fell from him: he was not, for God took him. He endured no pangs of death; there was no last grievous struggle. He *fell asleep!* The new mysterious life of the world to come was his. The shadow

and the sting of death were for those who remained to mourn his loss.

The star of John Grey's mortal life faded not into the darkness of the night, nor went down behind any cloud-banked, dull horizon, for it melted into the light of the eternal day. The night was past and gone—the long night of threescore and fifteen years! They who loved him best could see the brightening of the Eastern skies; but the glorious morning—the full, perfected day—they might not behold—not yet, not yet!

And there was great mourning and lamentation throughout Bradfield, such as had never been in the memory of the oldest townsman. "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" wept Dr. Burrowes. "Alas! my brother," said many who were not of the departed saint's communion. As for Carvary, it sorrowed as orphans sorrow, and yet it could not but rejoice for him whose rest was won, whose warfare was accomplished. With singular force they could apply to him the well-known lines—

"He woke, and caught his Captain's eye;
Then, strong in faith and prayer,
His spirit, with a bound,
Left its encumbering clay:
His tent at sunrise on the ground
A darken'd ruin lay.

"Soldier of Christ, well done!
Praise be thy new employ;
And, while eternal ages run,
Rest in thy Saviour's joy."

A few days more, and devout men carried John Grey to his burial. It was a day of gloom for Bradfield, for the whole kingdom. The streets were silent and hushed, as, between weeping crowds, the long funeral procession passed; the shops were closed, the church bells tolled solemnly through the mists of the grey November morning. From all parts of the country came ministers and laymen, alike anxious to render the last honours to this justly celebrated man. All the Episcopal clergy attended, Dr. Burrowes himself being foremost of the pall-bearers. Even Mr. Pettifer felt himself constrained to follow the example of his brethren, but he sat unmoved, with a weak

simper on his self-complacent face, one of the very few incongruous elements of that sad scene. And so they committed to the dust all that was mortal of good John Grey; but the work that he did in Bradfield and for all Christendom still lives and still progresses; for Christ's true work can never fail for want of instruments.

And on the next Sunday far and wide were preached what are called funeral sermons. Dr. Burrowes' large old parish church was not only full—crowded to the very porches—but thousands went away unable even to reach from without the churchyard-gates. It was the same thing at Carvary, where the youthful minister who had been assistant pastor for several years conducted the service. Would he be John Grey's successor? Would the church choose him for their teacher; would they take his inexperience, his immature judgment, after the profound wisdom they had deferred to so long? Dr. Bethell and Dr. Burrowes both thought there might be troublous days in store for Carvary; and they prayed that God would guide these people, and lead them to a right and wise decision, and preserve to them that peace with which they had been so richly endued for half a century.

CHAPTER VII.

"THE TRUTH."

DR. BETHELL, though his intercourse with the late pastor of Carvary had necessarily been most scant, yet knew him well enough to revere his worth, and to deplore the loss which not only Bradfield but all Christian churches had sustained. Also he sympathised with his friend Dr. Burrowes, who felt deeply the departure of the aged Nonconformist minister. His own church matters, too, required just then the exercise of great tact, admirable temper, and discretion, so that he found himself fully occupied, and unable to pay visits to Salamanca House. But he sent his wife thither; "for," said he, "women understand women, I suppose, and being a woman yourself, Madge, you will perhaps deal better with Miss Lane than I should myself."

And Madge went, and was barked at by Snap, and shown by Rhoda into the desolate front parlour, which looked cleaner and colder, and more dismally formal than ever. "What sort of life could the woman have who owned such a parlour?" Mrs. Bethell questioned of herself. The very sight of it, the very atmosphere of the place, sent her own spirit down below zero; and before the weary five minutes during which she waited for Miss Lane had expired, she came to the conclusion that she should worry her children and squabble with her husband if she were condemned to exist for any length of time in that soul-oppressing chamber. At the end of the five minutes Miss Lane came in, and regarded Mrs. Bethell with an air of mingled defiance and suspicion. There was literally nothing to steal, or else poor Madge thought she might have been suspected of dishonest intentions. She felt herself colouring-up like a girl when Miss Lane said, "I do not know to what I am to attribute the honour

of this visit," and in a tone, too, which implied that the "honour" was simply a figure of speech.

"Dr. Bethell wished me to call upon you; so many things have occurred during the last few days to engage his attention, and he felt that you were being quite neglected. He thought, too, that I, as a woman, might feel more with you—might be of more use to you——"

But Mrs. Bethell perceived that she was treading on very uncertain ground, for dissatisfaction was startlingly visible on the unamiable countenance before her; and Miss Lane, who had never studied the art of politeness, and who, indeed, despised as weak and false the *suaviter in modo*, did not hesitate to interrupt her faltering sentence. "Thank you, Mrs. Bethell; but I do not see that anybody can be of any use to me. Mr. Salisbury is my man of business; I suppose he is as good as any other, and my father trusted him."

"The Doctor thinks very highly of him, I know," Mrs. Bethell gently interposed. But the heiress only replied by a half gesture, which seemed to say that Dr. Bethell's opinion was not of much account with her. Never in all her life had poor Madge Bethell found herself in such uncongenial society.

"Dr. Bethell was very kind during my father's illness," continued Miss Lane, in the same hard, dry, matter-of-fact way—a way, Mrs. Bethell privately thought, that would be enough to drive any one mad who was shut up with her, and at all in her power. "But I really do not see that I need trouble him any further. Perhaps you want a subscription for something?"

"I never thought of such a thing."

"Ministers do send their wives begging, I know. Men usually employ women to do their dirty work for them."

"And you think begging—that is, collecting money for charitable and religious purposes—dirty work?"

"I do; though in Parson Bunn's time I did collect for the Bible Society. His daughter and I had a district together. But I was quite a child, and I knew no better."

"You were much attached to Mr. Bunn, I think?" asked Mrs. Bethell, delighted to be able to talk about anything with this strange woman, of whom in her inmost soul she was half afraid.

"My mother was," answered Miss Lane; "and, indeed, I may say I was myself. He preached such sermons, such *solemn* sermons! Ah! those were days, indeed; no falling asleep in Zion, no tampering with unsound doctrine, no foolish speculations, no worldly-mindedness. Since Pastor Bunn's last sermon—how well I remember it! his text was, 'Flee from the wrath to come.' Oh, no! that was the Sunday before; the last was, 'Weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.' It was most solemn, most awful. And since that sermon we have not had one faithful discourse; the Gospel has never since been preached in all its fulness at St. Oswald's."

Now, considering that Mrs. Bethell's husband had preached in that church twice every Sunday, and one evening in every week between, for more than three months, this was a pretty cool statement to make, and Mrs. Bethell did not feel inclined to let it go unquestioned. Still, she wanted to conciliate this strange specimen of a religion*ism* that had so little to do with a true and vital piety. I think it first occurred to Mrs. Bethell, as she sat shivering in that doleful parlour, talking to the heiress, that "religionism" is of various kinds and complexions, and that it and "religion" are two distinct and very separate affairs. So she answered, quite gently, though in her heart she felt a little wifely resentment, "That depends very much, Miss Lane, upon what you call the Gospel."

Sarah, in all her blackness, drew herself up, and literally glared upon Mrs. Bethell, who, not being accustomed, as Rhoda was, to be glared at, began to wonder whether she were shut up with an insane, at least, a partially insane, person.

With awful emphasis, Miss Lane slowly enunciated, "The Gospel! I should think there can be no manner of doubt as to what *that* is!"

"What do you understand by the Gospel?"

"What do I understand! *understand*, indeed! as if understanding were of any use! Why, the Gospel is the *truth*."

"Certainly, but truth is many-sided: that which appeals most strongly to one mind scarcely touches another. No one human mind holds all the truth."

"All the truth is in the Bible, and there is no truth

anywhere else, whatever Dr. Bethell may affirm to the contrary."

"The germ of all truth is there. Every truth that the world receives has its root in the Bible. But fresh developments of truth are ever accruing. God's truth is boundless, and He is ever pouring out fresh currents for the good and training of mankind. The truth is one and undivided, even as the Godhead: but truth has many aspects, and presents itself under many phases."

"That seems to me impossible. I cannot understand it. Parson Bunn always preached-up '*the* truth:' not many truths, some of which may just as well be untruths as not. And my mother always impressed upon me the immense importance of the truth; the truth of the Bible. I do not believe in this many-sided truth."

"You are most illogical, Miss Lane."

"I dare say I am; I wish to be illogical where the truth is concerned. I don't want fleshly wisdom. I hold fast to the faith once delivered to the saints."

"And I believe I do, also. But, Miss Lane, are you not making to yourself an illogical god, another god than the Lord? What is our human reason given to us for, but that we may use it? Is it not, though girt about with humanity, from *Him?* God may and does call upon me to believe what I cannot understand; indeed, if I believed *only* what I understood, I should believe next to nothing. Everything about me and within me is a mystery and a miracle. I recognise certain facts, I acknowledge certain laws which are radically, though not always apparently, as absolute and as immutable as the will of God Himself; which indeed they must be, for all law is of Him, and is the expression of His will. I believe in the Lawgiver, but can I pretend to understand *Him*, or that which, by His sovereign will, He works either in the world of nature or of grace? As well might the sucking child seek to comprehend the complex abstrusities of sciences which as yet only the most learned, the most patient but dimly apprehend! But to believe that which is beyond my reason, and to believe that which is opposed to reason, to common sense, are quite two different things. And truth suffers no wrong by its myriad-sidedness. Which would you care for most—a dull, unpolished diamond, which you, as an

unscientific person, must take upon trust as to its being what it is said to be; or the same diamond, ground, and fashioned, and cut into a thousand brilliant facets? Oh! believe me, *truth* loses nothing, but gains everything by its varied presentations and adaptations to different minds, whether it be the minds of individuals or of generations."

"I never argue on sacred subjects," replied Miss Lane, shortly; "don't let us talk any more about it." Which was Sarah's unassailable refuge when she felt that the conversation was going against her, or when any point was mooted with which she did not agree. It was very convenient, and saved her from a thousand difficulties, and from the mortification of being *proved* to be in the wrong. For Sarah had the most unwavering and unlimited belief in herself, as compared with any other person; and unless you believed as she believed, you were at once considered unsafe, unsound, and *unscriptural.*

No doubt Sarah Lane was a good woman, after her own fashion; but oh! how disagreeable. She was an infliction, and people who thought it their duty to do so took her like a prescribed dose of bitters; she might do them good, but a very wry face they made of it; they could not help it. One may have to endure the Sarah Lanes of the world, because it is God's will that so it should be, and in the end the endurance will bear fruit in a plentiful crop of patience, meekness, charity, and unselfishness.

Quinine, quassia, bitter aloes, even the "camomile tea," in which old women used to delight, have their mission, and so have Sarah Lanes. But, oh! the discipline is very sore, and the medicine is not merely nauseous, but very, very costly, and an overdose may, if no antidotes be taken, prove fatal.

Whether Sarah thought change of place would be favourable to change of thought, I cannot say, but at this juncture she arose and invited Mrs. Bethell into the "sitting-room," where there was a fire. Mrs. Bethell gratefully accepted, though not quite sure whether the movement were not made to accelerate her departure. She could not, however, leave just yet, for she had to inquire about Nora Lane; therefore she followed the heiress into a back parlour, the which Dr. Bethell had been greatly puzzled to describe, inasmuch as he could not

determine whether it was a parlour at all, or only a *best kitchen*. Madge's feminine instincts told her at a glance that it was a composite apartment, and that it figured, or had figured in both capacities. The prospect from the uncurtained window was far from enlivening. There was a high whitewashed wall on one side of the narrow yard, and what Rhoda always called "a long slang" of low-roofed kitchen buildings on the other. The space between was covered over with blue bricks, which had been washed and swilled till they were tolerably uneven. There was also a superannuated pump, painted green, and a bulky water-butt, likewise painted green. There was a coal-heap at the end of the kitchens, but that was not absolutely within view. The bricked yard was continued by a garden-walk, which might have been gravelled a quarter of a century before; it was bordered on the right by a lower whitewashed wall, and five lanky black poplars, now leafless; not to speak of a nice little open gutter, which at intervals—it had its source in the back-kitchen, at the sink—flowed merrily beneath the poplars. Rhoda often got into trouble about that gutter. On the left of the path spread out the garden, or at least a portion of the garden. It had once been productive in its way; and it was productive now, inasmuch as it grew whole wildernesses of stunted chickweed, sooty groundsel, and common African marigold! There were rose-bushes, which occasionally showed a bud, but never by any chance a bloom; there were huge bushes of golden rod, which never flowered, and of Michaelmas daisy, which did flower feebly. There were lilacs, which had long ago ceased to flower; and there were other things—a few dahlias and nasturtiums, for instance, which made a pretence of flowering every year, but ignominiously failed. There were herbs, also—mint and peppermint, sage and thyme, and some very dirty-looking parsley; and in one corner was an original sort of summer arbour or pent-house made of planks, roughly fashioned, and built into the angle of two dismal, high, smoke-dried black brick walls. Indeed, everything was black and smoke-dried, and it could not be helped, since in the near neighbourhood of Salamanca House legions of chimneys, tall and short, poured forth for six days in

the week unceasing volumes of dense smoke. And as this smoke pertained to all kinds of manufactories, and to some where chemical agencies were applied, it naturally followed that deleterious gases were continually being generated, which poisoned the air so far as to injure materially vegetable life. Whether these gases were good for human life was another question, but any particularly unpleasant odour is sure to be pronounced "healthy;" and even the neighbourhood of vitriol and aqua-fortis works, gasometers, brick-kilns, brass-foundries, and guano manufactories are occasionally recommended as highly salubrious!

As for the sitting-room itself, it was stencilled, not papered, and there were impossible red rosebuds, and great sprawling blue-green oak-leaves on all the walls; and beams ran across the middle of the uneven ceiling, and there was no cornice. An ancient Kidderminster carpet covered the floor; an enormous *bureau* or secretary, or whatever such a nondescript piece of furniture might be called, filled a recess, and a loud-ticking mahogany-cased eight-day clock stood in another. The hearth, however, was clean and cheerful, the fire burned clearly, the grate shone from the combined effects of black-lead, judiciously administered, and honest elbow-grease, and the brass fender looked as grand as gold. The chimney ornaments, however, were singularly incongruous; they consisted of highly polished brass candlesticks, a pepper-box, a pestle and mortar, two spill-cups, and a box of ordinary lucifer-matches.

Mrs. Bethell wondered how soon the mistress of half a million of money would invest in statuettes and candelabras and French timepieces. She herself had a secret and unconfessed weakness for bronzes. But now to begin the charge. She had received absolute commands to bring back news of Miss Nora Lane, at least if any such news there were. Mrs. Bethell commenced.

"I cannot tell you how much my husband was grieved to hear of your brother's death. It must have been a great shock to you, following as it did so immediately upon your great trouble."

"Mr. Salisbury told him, I suppose?"

"Only the bare fact. Have you heard anything further?"

Sarah pursed up her mouth, uncertain as to Mrs. Bethell's right to put so leading a question. But reserve was not one of Miss Lane's characteristics; she was one of those persons who prefer always to air their grievances, and ventilate their woes, and pour their griefs from one vessel into another. If Sarah had a trouble, real or imaginary, it was her chief consolation to talk about it. Therefore, the temptation to have it all over with an intelligent and apparently sympathising listener was irresistible.

"Indeed, it was very dreadful," she answered, "and I have not the least reason to believe that there was any hope in his death. My poor brother was always given up to this world; and of late, I fear—from what I gather from letters addressed to Mr. Salisbury—he had imbibed infidel sentiments. But, living in that ungodly, dissolute, Sabbath-breaking France, it is not greatly to be wondered at. Still, he knew the truth, for he had Gospel privileges in his youth; not that that is any comfort, for it makes his case so much the worse. He knew the Lord's will and did it not; he had learned the way, but he never walked therein—the greater then his guilt, and the greater his punishment!" And Sarah shook her head dolefully. She had not a doubt in her own mind but that her two lately deceased relatives were "lost;" indeed, she said as much, and brought the tears into her visitor's eyes.

"No, do not say that," she implored: "how can you tell? how can any one tell? Especially in the case of your brother, we may hope. Oh! God's ways are not as our ways; *He* willeth not the death of the sinner. And He sees what we do not see; He knows the *inmost* heart; blessed be His holy name! And He is cognisant of the why and the wherefore; and oh! dear Miss Lane—GOD IS LOVE!"

"Or else we had all been consumed long ago; but God is also a just God, and He cannot away with sin. His eyes are too pure to behold evil."

"Persistent evil—yes! But I think—nay, I am sure—that God is more merciful than the best of men. He knows all; He reads the secrets of the soul; He sees how men have been made evil; like as a father, He pitieth His children. A father is not hard with his children, you

know; he makes excuses for them, he bears with them; if they go wrong, and find out the bitterness of wrong-doing, and come back to him, he meets them—you know the parable?—he falls upon their neck and kisses them."

But Sarah sat bolt upright—her natural position—no grace of *abandon* was hers; and she still shook her head. And then Mrs. Bethell remembered that to this woman she was speaking a strange language; what knew she of an earthly father's love, an earthly father's tenderness, an earthly father's yearning over the child to whom he had given being? Thank God, all ye who know, or have known, the sweetness, the generosity, the great compassion of a true father's love. It is hard to miss mother-love; how hard, only those who see what it is to others, and know it not themselves, can tell; but harder still is it never to know the earthly meaning of that blessed mysterious word "*fatherhood*," which imports so much, and which is the figure and the type of the relationship between ourselves and our dear Father who is in heaven. It is difficult to say, even in thought, "*Our Father*," without adding, "hallowed be Thy name!" And it was Christ Himself who taught men to call God, "Our Father." Had it been any meaner, any mere human authority, we might have faltered, nor dared to claim so sweet and intimate a bond. But Christ—our Master, our Elder Brother—has said it, and we may say it and rejoice. Woe for those to whom the blessed name of *father* is but a dead letter. Having no conception of human fatherhood, how shall they embrace the Divine? But this, also, our God knows. He knows and pities—ay, and *loves*—the men and women who are hardened because they have never known human father-love. Oh, God! our God! well may the children of men call Thee the only "GOOD!"

"And your little niece?" asked Mrs. Bethell.

"She must come here, I suppose. It is my duty to take her, and be a mother to her; I see that. It will be a trial to me to have always about me the daughter of a giddy, irreligious Frenchwoman; brought up, too, in France, full of nonsense and frivolity, and perhaps worse. But I will make her an Englishwoman before I have done with her;

and it will go hard with me if I do not turn her out a Lane of the old good times. I shall not tolerate any over-the-water whims; I mean to have no foolishness. And if she is a good girl, and a wise girl, and not a very stupid girl—which I do not think she can be—we may be very happy together. Altogether, it appears to me the right thing that my orphan niece should live with me, and be subject to me."

"*Be subject!*" Ah! there would be the difficulty. But it seemed hard to Sarah that she who had been so long subject to others' wills should not now have a will in subjection to her own. It might be very agreeable to Sarah herself; but how would it be to the one subjected? And only a week ago Mrs. Lupin had said to Mrs. Bethell, "I do not want to speak evil of Sarah Lane, but I do think it is a mercy she never married. For the instincts of motherhood are not in her, and she would make any children miserable; she would expect everything from them, and yet sacrifice nothing herself. She could not help being a tyrant, because tyranny is in her blood; she might not be an unkind mistress of *slaves*, but she would never be a good, loving mother to children of her own. And it is a very wise providence that she hasn't any, let alone the unlucky man who must have been the father of them." And now she was about to take the place of mother to this poor orphan child, whose temperament and characteristics would almost certainly clash with hers at every turn.

"I hope she will not speak French," said Sarah, presently.

"She will naturally speak the language of the country in which she was born, and so far educated. But her letter was English—though not very good English, my husband said; I did not see it myself."

"I will have no foreign jabbering here! Then as to her religion. She may be a Roman Catholic; her mother was, I believe. Poor Tom was *nothing;* at least, he always said one religion was as good as another; and so far from valuing the precious teaching of his boyhood, he flung it aside the moment he had the alternative. He had a pious mother, and he was taken to St. Oswald's when he was only three years old, and now he is *lost!* And the girl

is sure to be frivolous; all Frenchwomen are. Oh, dear me! what shall I do with her? But I will have no Papist in my house, and no novels, and she shall dress decently, and behave herself as a member of a godly English household."

"When do you expect your niece?"

"I have not yet written to tell her I will have her, and I am sure I do not know how she is to be got here, all the way from Tarbes. Of course she cannot travel alone, and it is not to be expected that I should go and fetch her. Perhaps you know of some trustworthy person whom I might send?"

Mrs. Bethell thought it just possible that after the receipt of her aunt's letter Miss Nora Lane might refuse to come and be her pensioner. If she were fifteen or sixteen, as the Doctor believed, she might surely please herself, supposing only that she could find in France the means of sustenance. "For I," said Mrs. Bethell afterwards, in confidence to her husband, "would rather turn maid-of-all-work—I am not sure but that I would rather marry a travelling tinker—than live at Salamanca House under the authority of its mistress."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE VESTRY.

It was quite the end of November when Dr. Burrowes and Dr. Bethell sat together in the vestry of the old church, having what the beadle called "a regular crack of talk." It was Wednesday morning, and there had been a tolerable batch of marriages, and some babies had come to be christened, and their mammas to be "churched," according to the usage of Conformity. There was always plenty of such business to be done at St. Olave's, for to that saint was the ancient parish church of Bradfield dedicated.

All the weddings save one had been of the most plebeian description, but that one accounted for Dr. Bethell's presence, for the son of a St. Oswald's wire-drawer had married the daughter of a St. Olave's button manufacturer, and the two D.D.'s were retained to perform the ceremony.

"When do you start?" asked Dr. Burrowes.

"I go up to London to-night, and sleep at my sister's at Herne Hill, which is convenient for the 'London, Chatham, and Dover.' We go on to-morrow, in time to meet the Calais boat."

"Does Mrs. Bethell accompany you?"

"No; I am taking my daughter Gertrude. Mamma and I both thought it would be better, for my Gertie is such a winning, sunshiny little puss, and girls naturally take to each other, you see."

"You take a great interest in these Lanes?"

"I do; I can scarcely tell you why. I think Miss Lane is the most uncomfortable and repulsive woman whom I have ever encountered in decent life, and yet I feel strangely attracted to her. She reminds me of a good old heathen."

"A heathen? And one of old Bunn's sheep!"

"Old Bunn's theology is the torment of my life; I meet it at every step, confronting me and reproaching me. Sometimes I am told I preach 'strange doctrines;' one day I am an Arminian, the next I am a Socinian, and the next a Chartist and *an infidel!* Then some of the young people have given, and are giving, me trouble in another direction: reaction being a psychological as well as a physiological necessity, some of these *jeunes esprits*, in their eagerness to get out of the ruts, have *got off the rails*."

"It strikes me you might preach what you pleased to *that* congregation, if you only respected their Shibboleths! Use a certain phraseology, only keep to a certain so-called spiritualism in dialect, and you may preach Hegel, Kant, Emerson—anybody you will."

"Very likely, but that is just what I am *not* going to do. On the other hand, I preach old truths under a new face, and so nobody recognises them. And I am charged with heresy."

"My dear friend, Bradfield is behind the age *in toto;* but St. Oswald's is behind all Bradfield. I am afraid those people will grieve you sorely, and wound you, too."

"I fear they will. I am beginning to see how troubled are the waters in which I have launched the good ship of my ministry. I see breakers ahead."

"Only don't fly over the heads of your people! Do not imagine you have your cultivated London flock to deal with. The St. Oswald's people are grossly ignorant; —they must be, for all their pet dogmas are truths, or semi-truths, stranded on the shoals of ignorance. They will not move either to the right hand or to the left; they are afraid lest some *new* dogma should present itself, which haply they may be compelled to believe. They dare not examine any article of their creed, lest it should be found false; and they are not so much to blame, these poor St. Oswaldians, for they have been taught from their youth upwards that to *doubt*—to doubt certain doctrines—is to be damned!"

"How much like Romanism, which they dread and detest, is the faith of these people, and of the school to which they belong."

"Startlingly so! The infallibility of their teaching seems to be among the articles of their religion."

"And yet they would tell you that human infallibility is a figment of Popery, and an insult to the Most High! Nothing would they deprecate sooner than the assumption of infallibility in their midst."

"Except the spirit of free yet reverent inquiry. To think for yourself is, with these so-called—oh, how ill-called!—Evangelicals, the sin of sins."

"But how *can* they believe it? With the Bible itself in their hands; with the history of the world's nineteen centuries before them—how can they?

"The Bible they *interpret!* and, mark me, a great deal of truth underlies their interpretation, as is also the case with that of Rome. As for history,—ah, that reminds me. You are accused of saying that it is better in the present day to read a chapter of Goldsmith's or Pinnock's History of England or Rome, than a chapter of the Old or New Testament."

Dr. Bethell rose to his feet. "When did I, according to your informants, say *that*, Dr. Burrowes?"

"In your own pulpit, several Sunday evenings since."

"I said nothing of the kind."

"I am perfectly sure you did not; but what did you say which could be freely translated into so extraordinary a statement?"

"Let me think. I was preaching from the text, '*Thy word is Truth!*' And I was trying to make them see how Truth, though in itself unchangeable, yet presents innumerable aspects; how new things spring out of old; how in each succeeding age God develops fresh perfections of His law, even as a rose unfolds itself, leaf after leaf, and petal after petal, from the dry root which the ground covered all through the dark and icy winter. I told them how the universal mind grows older, and broader, and deeper, from the inherited wisdom of past centuries, and how our Lord God suits His revelations of Himself to the capacities of those to whom He is revealed; how, on the tree of truth, blossom after blossom expands; how, in the firmament of truth, hitherto unseen planets are ever being discovered; how, in the wide illimitable ocean of God's truth, fresh currents come and go, and tides rise or fall,

according to *His* will, who ordereth all things both in heaven and earth; and then I bade my hearers look and judge for themselves; I bade them note how dim, imperfect, and shadowy were God's revelations of the truth to His ancient people the Jews; how all the Old Testament saints saw but darkly what to us is clear as the unclouded noon; how much clearer was the light which came with Christ, and which shines from the pages of the New Testament—and here, I suppose, comes the arch-heresy! I said, 'And how, as centuries have rolled by, clearly and still more clearly shines the light from the cross. We in these latter days may see what primitive saints and apostles could not see; what they were not ready for seeing; what the world was not ready or willing to receive! And starting from New Testament and early church times, and going on through the ages, century after century, to the present day, we find how God has wrought with His people —how in His dealings with nations, and sometimes with individuals, we have fresh revelations of His love as of His power; how we learn that which our fathers could not have learnt; because the time—*God's time*—was not yet come.' This and much more I said, and, in conclusion: 'History, true history, which, rightly understood, is only the record of God's dealing with the peoples, is, as it were, a vast continuous Bible, whose last book, whose *finis*, will never be written till the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.'"

"All that is very true and very grand; but, my dear friend, you shot over the heads of your people. Half of it was incomprehensible to them. That you put secular history and the Bible together——"

"There is no such thing as secular history. History is the record of God's own work! History is in itself *sacred*, though wicked men may outwardly profane it. I reverence history. I dare not touch it with profane hand. I know there has been written a Comic History of England. I would as soon write a Comic History of the Jews. I would as soon parody the Psalms. I would as soon falsify knowingly the Books of Moses, as I would carelessly or maliciously misrepresent the reigns of Elizabeth Tudor and Oliver Cromwell."

"I do not wonder that your people call you a Chartist; they will call you something worse before long."

"How do you escape yourself? Though differing on some immaterial points, I think you and I agree pretty well as regards general views."

"Oh, I get abused sometimes; who does not? I fought my battles seven years ago, when I first came here. Besides, my people are of a different type from yours; they are not, as a body, frightened out of their wits every time a new idea strikes them. They are broader, more catholic, too, and are learning to look upon sect as an infirmity. Don't you know the old proverb that one man may steal a horse, while another may not look over the gate? Well, you are in the position of the man who cannot go near the field without being traduced. I might preach a startling sermon at St. Olave's and get nothing but praise and encouragement; you might preach the self-same sermon in your own pulpit, and get denounced as a Jew, Turk, heretic, and infidel for your pains. Cheer up, my dear brother; it will not last for ever. Those who lead the way must always suffer reproach as being unsound, unsafe, &c. It was so with the Reformers; it was so with the early Christians when their faith began to subvert heathenism; it was so with the apostles—the men who were charged with turning the world upside down; and (with reverence be it spoken) it was so with our blessed Lord Himself. He must have been charged with heresy; He must have been reckoned an infidel and a latitudinarian. The multitude, we know, cried, 'Away with Him!' We can scarcely doubt that the '*orthodox*' of that day turned from Him as from one with whom it would be unsafe to consort, disreputable to associate. And shall we complain if we are invited to taste that bitter cup of isolation and misconstruction which *He* drained to the dregs?"

"How is that young man succeeding at Carvary?"

Dr. Burrowes looked grave. "I fear there will be trouble at Carvary. I met Stanley the other day, and he was feeling greatly perplexed; there was a depression about him most foreign to his nature. Whether the church will choose him for sole pastor he cannot tell; and whether he can remain if they do so choose him, he cannot yet decide."

"They will be very foolish, those Carvary people, if they let him go. He is young certainly, to be the head of such a church; but in his youth there is a power, a vigour, a noble earnestness, and an acumen which may be vainly sought in many an older and maturer man. He will doubtless commit some errors of judgment; what then? We all make mistakes, and pay for them; but I say there is the making of a grand man—a leader and commander of his people—in this Ernest Stanley, if only he be allowed fair play."

"He will have fair play—if not at Carvary, elsewhere. He is not a man to succumb to the force of mere circumstance. But I shall be deeply grieved should dissensions arise around the grave of my beloved and honoured friend. There is a great deal to be said in favour of the people choosing their own pastor, and—or so it seems to me—there is a great deal to be said against it. I must say I should not like to go out preaching 'on approbation.' It must be trying, even to mere youths fresh from college; but what it must be to middle-aged experienced ministers of Christ I cannot guess. I do not quite believe in our system, but we escape some of the trials to which our brethren in Dissenting churches are exposed."

"I don't know; *I was a curate once*," replied Dr. Bethell, grimly. "Some men are curates or subordinates to their lives' end. I could a tale unfold."

CHAPTER IX.

"A SORT OF HERETIC."

DR. BETHELL and his daughter Gertrude reached Dover safely early in the afternoon. The Calais boat was due soon after three o'clock. It was a wretched day, just the sort of day which makes poor old England look her very worst, as if she were persistently miserable and sulky, and trying to the utmost to demonstrate how exceedingly unlovely and how intensely disagreeable she can be upon occasion. The air was raw, cold, and damp; no perceptible rain had fallen since the previous evening, and yet everything out of doors was dripping with moisture, and everything within was clammy to the touch. Heavily hung the low, brooding clouds over the ancient castle on the hill; thickly gathered the chilly mists along the dark coast-line; the cliffs were scarcely visible; only gaunt, shadowy, and awful, rose up the giant South Foreland out of the brumous vapours of the fast-falling evening shades. A cruel east wind was wailing and sweeping up the Straits; the tide was coming in in a dreary, restless, half-baffled sort of way, as if it were irritably telling the land how uncomfortable it was out at sea. The tossing waves, as they sobbed and heaved against the pier, were black and turbid; at a very short distance from the shore the sea-line ended in a dismal bank of mingled bog and cloud. One might have fancied the world ended there on the wet, dusky, Dover beach, and that naught lay beyond save illimitable spaces of angry water and cold, drenching mists.

Dr. Bethell and Gertrude made their arragements at the "Lord Warden;" and then, as it was already three o'clock, they went out to watch the coming of the boat. Gertrude shivered in her seal-skin jacket, and as she wrapt her veil well about her head, she said—"What will this child think of England, papa?"

"She will think it everything that is wretched, Gertie; and really, I must say, it is about as miserable as it can be. November is treating us to one of her worst moods, ere she takes leave of us for the year. How chilly the wind is! Let us walk up and down, my dear; this keen east wind pierces to the very joints and marrow. I must not take you back to mamma with a bad cold!"

"I never take cold," replied Gertrude, with all the happy confidence of her healthy youth. "But let us promenade a little. How few people there are to meet the steamer, papa! Excepting the coast-guard yonder, and the harbour and railway officials, we are almost alone on the pier. Hark! is that the whistle?" The next moment a flag was run up, and there was a lazy bustle among the men near at hand. Then they heard the paddles, and almost as soon as they saw her funnel, the Calais boat was being moored alongside the pier. There were not many passengers, and as far as the Bethells could make out, there was among them no feminine creature, save an old lady with lap-dog and parrot, on deck.

"Oh, dear!" said Dr. Bethell, in sudden consternation. "I am afraid Miss Leonora has not arrived, and we shall be kept here another day. Let us go on board, if we may."

They were just crossing to the steamer, and Gertie was still on the plank, when some one came wearily up the cabin stairs, assisted by the stewardess. "That cannot be Miss Lane," said the doctor, decidedly, as he looked round for the steward or the captain. "She is not come after all, Gertie." The lady who had just reached the deck was young; but she looked—or at least, so they thought—quite five-and-twenty. The night had suddenly fallen; for the steamer was behind time, and it was getting late, and too dark to distinguish features, and all they could see of the stranger was a very white face, a rather tall figure carelessly muffled in all sorts of heavy wraps, and a very delicate ungloved hand grasping the arm of the stewardess.

"Now, miss!" said that functionary, "here we are all safe and sound. Rouse up! you'll be all right in a quarter of an hour. Don't you expect nobody to meet you?"

"I thought there would be some person," answered a soft, low voice, in an unmistakably foreign accent. "But it matters not; I can go to the hotel, as I did in Paris." But the stewardess at that moment caught sight of Dr. Bethell and Gertrude, who stood uncertain whether to advance or retire. Poor Tom Lane's daughter was not more than fourteen, according to her aunt's statement. This lady could not possibly be Miss Leonora! "Are these your friends, miss?" said the stewardess. "Is it this young lady you are looking for, sir? She has been so ill all the way across—and she was half dead with cold and tiredness when she came on board, poor thing!—that she can hardly speak to you, much less look after her baggage. She can only just stand, you see; but she'll be better directly. Don't you feel the air a relief, miss?"

"I have come to meet Miss Leonora Lane."

The girl—for she could be only a girl after all—looked up quickly, and replied—"*Mais, oui!* Ah, yes! *c'est moi* —it is I who am Leonora Lane." She pronounced the *a* so broadly that Aunt Sarah would scarcely have recognised the patronymic.

So Dr. Bethell took possession, and the stewardess being recompensed, and the luggage claimed and committed to an hotel porter, they set off along the pier, the doctor going first, with Miss Lane on his arm, and Gertrude following, carrying the young lady's bag and one of the shawls which fell from her shoulders as she stepped on shore. A few yards brought them to the hotel; it was a comfort to get out of the raw, cold, thick atmosphere into the warm, well-lighted sitting-room which Dr. Bethell had engaged; and here Gertrude began to take the initiative. Hastily flinging her own hat and jacket aside, she at once proceeded to disembarrass her charge of sundry scarves, cloaks, and shawls, and to remove her hat. Then they saw the slim figure of a young, growing girl, and the face of a sick, wearied, sorrowful woman. It was an almost deathly pallor on which Gertrude gazed, and the features were swollen either with cold or with crying. There were livid circles round the eyes, and the mouth seemed yet quivering with suppressed sobs. Masses of rich, dark, dishevelled hair hung round this woeful face and on the drooping shoulders. Gertie was rather taken aback; she

had come to pet and comfort a child, for a girl of thirteen or fourteen seems quite a child to a young person in her twentieth year, and she found—she scarcely knew what, but certainly no child.

"Perhaps Miss Lane would like to go to bed, papa," said Gertrude, uncertain whether their guest were going to sleep, or going to faint, or going to turn sulky on their hands.

"No; Miss Lane must have some dinner, and then she can retire as soon as she pleases."

"Dinner! I pray you—*no!*" said the girl, rousing up a little. "Me! I cannot eat any dinner. It is that I am so tired and also much *malade* with my sea journey."

"How far have you come to-day?"

"*Seulement*—only from Paris, I mean. But I did leave before nine o'clock this morning, and it was very cold on the railway."

"You breakfasted before you set out, I hope?"

"Yes, they brought me a roll and some butter and a cup of tea, and I did take some of it, because M. de Luchon, he who brings me from Bigorre, said I must. I did not want it."

"Yes, you did, and you want your dinner, and you will have to eat and drink before you go to bed. Take this" —and the Doctor held out a liqueur glass. "It is not nice, and it is rather strong, but it will do you good."

"It is not Cognac?" she said, imploringly.

"No, it is something very much worse than Cognac. But you have to drink it, nevertheless."

And he laughed kindly. The fatherly, protecting tone soothed and reassured her; she looked up and smiled, and took the potion from the hand of her new friend, and swallowed it obediently. But she made a wry face.

"It is very what you call *nasty*," she said. "It is medicine."

And in a few minutes she was evidently revived, and Gertie proposed that they should go to Miss Lane's room and get ready for dinner, which would be presently upon the table. Miss Lane assented; she was warm, she was gathering strength; the kind faces and voices had done her good, and her spirits, naturally elastic, began to rise.

Plentiful ablutions with warm water and a slight toilet

made a wonderful difference in the young stranger's appearance. Her black dress fitted her exactly, and her rich, abundant hair was arranged in glossy coils and braids round a very shapely little head. Two or three twists and turns with the hand did it all; Gertrude looked on admiringly.

"I really believe she is younger than I am, after all," said Gertie to herself as she tried to arrange her own untidy locks, all uncurled and blown about by the salt sea wind. "I wish I could do my hair like that. Why, she looks as if she had just arrived in a bandbox! And what lovely eyes! They are not blue; they are the colour of purple violets. I should say when she is quite well and happy she must be very pretty, far prettier than any one I have seen at Bradfield."

They went back to the sitting-room, and when the soup was placed upon the table Leonora no longer protested against being helped. The effects of the sea-sickness were passing away; the luxurious apartments, the well-served dinner, the warmth and the light, and, more than all, the kindly spirit of her new friends, combined to cheer her and to restore her to herself, for she was of a temperament easily elated, and still more easily depressed. But one thing rather startled both Gertrude and her father. As they sat down, Dr. Bethell "asked a blessing"—of the briefest, according to his custom, and at the same instant, Leonora very rapidly, and evidently as a matter of course, made the sign of the cross. She was then a Roman Catholic! What would Miss Lane say? Dr. Bethell almost shivered as he thought of another disturbing element being introduced into the already perturbed politics of St. Oswald's. Yet what was more natural than that this girl should profess the faith of Rome,—her mother probably being of that communion, her father of no religion at all, and herself born and brought up in a Catholic country?

Dinner being over, Miss Leonora was ready for conversation. There were still the circles round her eyes, still the traces of tears—passionate tears, too; but there was a faint bloom on the exquisitely-outlined cheek, and the violet eyes shone with renewed hope and restored vivacity. All her movements were graceful; her style, though not quite conventional, was thorough-bred; her

voice was sweet and clear; she spoke French rapidly, and, of course, purely; her English was not quite so fluent, but for a foreigner it was very good English notwithstanding. Her manner was singularly vivacious; very like that of a genuine Frenchwoman, but still tinctured with a certain reticence which bespoke her English origin. She had strong instincts, this Franco-English girl, and these instincts told her she was with *friends*—good, true, and sympathetic people. Moreover, her interest in herself had begun to revive; she had told herself that she did not care what became of her, and for a season this was certainly the truth. Now, she felt within her the stirrings of a new life, a sort of yearning for fresh experiences, and a longing to be gathered into somebody's loving arms once more. She wanted to know of her future; she wished fervently to hear something of the unknown relative to whom she was committing herself. Would she find in her the affection for which, scarcely six weeks orphaned, she pined already?

"But I do not perfectly comprehend," she said, in reply to some remark of Dr. Bethell's. "I do not know why you came to meet me. Are you from *ma tante?* Is it—ah, I hope it is! that we all belong the one to the other?"

"Not quite that, my dear," answered Dr. Bethell; "but I do come from your aunt. She could not"—the doctor might have said with truth, "*would* not"—"come herself, and Mr. Salisbury, whose name you know, was laid up with gout. I had particular business in London, and I had no objection to run down to Dover, and my little Gertie here is always ready to run in harness with her papa. So we offered to take charge of you as soon as ever you set foot on British soil; and to-morrow, when you are rested, we will take you to London, and the next day on to Bradfield, and to your aunt."

"Oh, thanks! you are very kind to me! I shall like to make my journey with you. Is Bradfield a pretty place?"

Dr. Bethell thought it best to be candid, so he replied: "No, not at all pretty. It is a very busy place, though, and one might learn much there. And there are some very nice people in Bradfield." But at the same time he added, as a mental reservation, "not many of them in my parish."

"My old home was so very pretty," she said, falteringly. Then, rather abruptly, to Dr. Bethell, "Are you a priest?"

"What you would call a priest; yes. I call myself a clergyman of the Church of England. You, I suppose, have been brought up in the faith of the Church of Rome?"

"Yes, and no," said Nora, quietly; "that is, if I have any religion, it is the Catholic religion. Poor mamma taught me always to make my prayers to God, and we went to the mass together every Sunday morning, and I learned the *Paternoster* and the *Ave Maria*, and some pretty hymns to the blessed Virgin. But papa would never let me confess to the *curé*, nor would he permit me to be confirmed, neither to make my first communion, as did the other young girls in our neighbourhood. He allowed me to go to church on Sunday, but he locked up the rosary of mamma after she died, and when Louison, our old servant, gave me another, blessed by monsieur the Cardinal himself, papa was in great anger, and he threw it into the fire, and scolded Louison, who wept, and wrung her hands, and said I should grow up a heretic. And a heretic I suppose I am; yet I do go, that is, I have gone to the Catholic church, and I know the mass almost by heart, and I love to hear the chanting, and to see the clouds of incense rising up from the high altar. Several times I went to the Protestant church at Toulouse, but I liked it not at all. There was no incense, and no fine music, and the church was only a big ugly room, and the pastor was not nice. He shouted, he bellowed, he did appear in grand fury, and all the people, especially the ladies, looked so cross. I do not think their religion made them at all happy."

"Then you think religion should make people happy?" asked Dr. Bethell, deeply interested in this young creature's *naive* account of herself.

"I do not know," she replied, doubtfully. "It is always said that the professed religious, the nuns, you know, are the happiest persons in the world; but me, I should die if I were shut up in a convent, and had nothing to do but to say my prayers, and make sweetmeats, and do embroidery, and dress the altar. There was old M. le Comte de Chavagnier; he did nothing, absolutely nothing, but make his salvation for seven years; and yet he was not happy."

"He was living to himself; that was why he was not happy. No person who lives to himself can possibly be happy, and there is no true religion in selfishness. And a person entirely devoted to his own interests is necessarily selfish."

"Even if those interests concern his personal salvation, papa?" asked Gertrude.

"Such exclusive devotion is only a refined form of selfishness, my dear. And our salvation is not wrought out by shutting our hearts from our fellow-creatures, by living in a convent cell, or in the cell of our own selfishness. That man lives nearest God whose soul is in sympathy with his fellow-mortals; who cares for their happiness; who strives, as far as in him lies, to make this bad world better; who seeks the happiness and the well-being of those with whom he is in the providence of God associated. Such a man is far more Christ-like, and it is in following Christ that we please our Heavenly Father, than he who performs innumerable acts of religion, sincere though they be. 'In the world, but not of it,' does not mean that we are to go up and down the world, caring for nothing that the world says or does, shaking our heads at its follies, pursing up our lips, and looking as solemn as if life were one long funeral. That is being not only in the world where the Lord Himself has placed us, but of the world of selfishness, and self-seeking, and self-righteousness. One hears much of the snares and vanities of the world; there is no snare so dangerous, so fatal as *self*."

"What is *ma tante* like?" was Nora's next question.

Dr. Bethell paused a little; then he answered, "I could not possibly describe her, Miss Nora; but I am told she is not at all like your papa, her brother. I think she will try and do her duty by you."

"Will she love me?"

"That, too, I cannot tell; I hope so. But much will depend upon yourself, my dear. And now, children, I think you ought to go to bed; Miss Lane must be very tired. I wonder if it be raining?"

Dr. Bethell drew back the crimson curtains and gazed out upon the night. And lo! the mists and the dull grey clouds had fled away. The sky was clear, the stars glittered faintly in its blue silent depths, and like a sea of silver lay

the waters of the Straits in the quiet, lustrous moonlight. Gertie and Nora, attracted by his exclamation of pleasure, followed him.

"Oh, papa! how beautiful," was all Miss Bethell said.

"It is fair exceedingly," said Nora, somewhat sadly; "almost as fair as my home in the glowing sunlight, with the rosy and violet air upon the mountains. But this is cold—ah, so cold!"

And she shivered slightly. Perhaps, poor child, she felt, in spite of all the kindness she had received, that she was in a strange land and among strangers. Perhaps the unutterable loneliness of the exile's spirit came over her as she gazed on the unfamiliar scene, and brought sorrow to her heart and tears to her eyes. There is something inexpressibly mournful in being far away from the land of our dead.

But the sea at full tide rippled on in the clear, calm radiance; the quaint little town nestled securely in the shadow of the castled heights, and the great cliffs stood up white and proud out of the seething waters at their base. And Dr. Bethell said, "Look, Nora! Several hours ago all this fair scene was shrouded in cold, dismal mist; there was no sea, no sky, no lighted town, no grand, gleaming headland, only the death-cold vapour shutting us in with only our own miserable selves. It has passed away, and we see the warmth, and brightness, and beauty that was close about us all the while. So will pass the mists and clouds of the greatest earthly sorrow; such days as the one now closing are types of some portions of our lives; the mist, and the cold, and the darkness come into all our lives; but the moonlight and the sunlight return in God's good time. After stormy days come glowing sunsets; the longest winter loses itself in the sweet return of spring, and the darkest night will slowly brighten into dawn. Never despair, for God is over all, and He wills the good and happiness of the creatures whom He has made."

The two girls quickly became friendly, and Nora told Gertie all her simple story. Her mother died when she was quite a child, and she had lived on in the little white-walled, vine-clad cottage not far from Bagneres de Bigorre, on the road to Tarbes, with her father and Louison, as

happy as the day, as careless as the playful kids that browsed upon the mountain pastures, as innocent and trusting as the little birds that folded their wings at nightfall beneath the eaves. She had been her father's little housekeeper—she had poured out his coffee, and ordered his omelettes, and bought heaps of juicy grapes, and luscious purple figs, and golden melons, and rosy tomatoes. He had been her only tutor. Louison wanted her to go to a school kept by the Carmelite nuns, who taught music, and Italian, and embroidering, and everything that a young lady should know.

"But, papa, *tant mieux pour moi*," said Nora, "would not listen. He told Louison I might learn from the nuns a great deal that was better left unlearned. He meant as regarded their religion. Mamma was not "a good Catholic," but she was a good Christian woman, I am sure. Papa, you know, did not believe either in the Catholic or in the Protestant Church, and he would not permit Louison to talk to me about religion, and so it came to pass that I grew up as I am—a sort of heretic. But that will not matter now—I am going to the land of heretics. I dare say the heretics are very good—they must be if they are like you and monsieur your papa. I don't believe that trash about heretics not going to heaven, you know. Papa taught me not to believe many things that he said were but old women's tales and 'priestcraft.'"

"Did he let you read the Bible?"

"Not till lately. He said he had been crammed with it when he was a boy, and it did him much harm. It was all Bible, collect, hymn, and catechism, and then catechism, hymn, collect, and Bible! And he had to listen to a pastor, who said that the good God would damn nearly everybody, and only save a very few; which cannot possibly be true, you know; for why should He make people on purpose to burn them up in fire for ever and ever? I think the devil—if there is any devil—might do it, but I am sure God would not. He could not, and be *good*, could He? And if God were not good, then there could be no religion, and the story of Jesus Christ must not be true."

Gertie said nothing, but her thought was, "How will she fare at St. Oswald's? What *will* Miss Lane say to so terribly heterodox a niece?"

Nora continued, "When I was fifteen papa said I might read the Gospels, and I did read them, and liked them much. I think they are quite true—that is, in themselves; but papa warned me against what people would say of them. He said priests of all creeds explained and explained the Gospels till they made them mean all sorts of things. So I read my little New Testament, and I say my prayers to God, and I go every week to the mass, and I try to be good, that I may please the good God, my Father who is in heaven."

"But, Nora, you do not bow down to the host, do you?" said Gertie, gravely.

"Not now. I did when I was little, because I saw all about me kneel and worship. But of course I know, now I am grown up, that a piece of bread cannot be God. Bah! it is too foolish! When it comes to that part of the mass I sit still and say my own prayers to God. Generally I say 'Our Father.' That must be the best prayer, I should imagine, for you see Christ made it Himself. I said it to papa the last thing the night he died, and he said, 'Yes, Nora; I am going to our Father. I thank Him that I know Him. Once I did not.' For you must understand, mademoiselle, that for years poor papa was very wretched because he could not believe in God. And the reason was that those people at Bradfield had brought him up to serve a false God, whom it was impossible to love—a God so much worse than himself that he could not pray to Him or in any way honour Him, and so he said to himself, 'There is no God.' But in his heart he thought there must be a God somewhere, though not the cruel, fierce, unjust God that M. le Pasteur Bonne preached about. I think his name was *Bonne*."

"Not quite,—it was *Bunn*. Papa says he was a good man, but mistaken; and that like many other people of that day, and some of this, he read the Bible through glasses with distorted lenses." But knowing all she did know of Mr. Bunn's teaching, Gertie felt sure that Nora's dear papa must have exaggerated the errors of his early teacher —which exaggeration was quite natural, since it is in human nature, which has been forced into one extreme, to rush into another. When we find out that the dogmas of our youth are partially untrue, we immediately assume

that they are all untrue, and strive conscientiously to get as far away from them as we can. "Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers;" still, though lingering, it does come at last, and we learn how in our childish, rash impetuosity, we have flung away the whole mass unsifted—dross and gold together. There are few if any men—that is, thinking men—who hold *no* truth; there are *none* who hold it all, though some by patient waiting upon God hold more than others. It is as Robertson of Brighton wrote:—"God's truth is boundless, yet both sides suppose that it is a pond which you walk round, and say, 'I know the truth!' What! all, all the truth? 'Yes, all; there it is circumscribed, defined, formed; and you are an infidel, if you do not think this pond of mine, that the great Mr. This or That dug, quite large enough to be the immeasurable Gospel of the Lord of the universe.'" Ah! we shall never know all the truth, till we stand on the other side, beyond the veil. And shall we know it even then? Will it not grow and grow upon us, in fresh and glorious developments, throughout eternity? For TRUTH is the revelation of God's own mind; and the mind of God is illimitable and exhaustless.

Gertie was quite right; poor Tom Lane, in his eagerness to cast away the harsh, crude dogmas of his early life, had cast away gems and pebbles jumbled up together. He had wooed freedom till licence came and filled his arms; he had, as Dr. Bethell was fond of saying, dashed out of the ruts, only to run off the rails.

CHAPTER X.

A FEMININE PARLIAMENT.

MRS. ASTON was going to give a large evening party, a kind of party for which the St. Oswald's folk were famous. You were expected to make your appearance about six o'clock, dressed of course in your Sunday best,—for "Sunday best" is an institution almost as binding as the observance of Sunday itself in a town like Bradfield. Indeed, there are some people—and Bradfield is by no means the only place in which they are to be found—whose Sabbatic ceremonials consist entirely of fine dress and a good dinner.

Arrived at the place of entertainment, the gentlemen were ushered into the drawing-room, where the host commonly stood upon the hearth-rug, his back to the fire,—and Bradfield knew what a fire should be, and never spared its fuel,—and his coat-tails under his arm. The ladies were taken upstairs, there to unrobe, and to don cap or head-dress, as the case might be, and generally to *titivate*—that most expressive verb, which I am not sure that the lexicons of our period acknowledge. The whole company being assembled (it consisted at first chiefly of ladies, the gentlemen, for the most part, coming later in the evening, some of them only just in time for supper), tea was announced, and the party adjourned to the dining-room, where a repast for any number of persons was sumptuously displayed. A large silver or electro-plated cake basket invariably occupied the centre of the table, and it was heaped with macaroons, ratafias, and other choicest biscuits. There were plum-cakes, seed-cakes, pound-cakes, madeira-cakes, and other cakes which need not be enumerated, though, I can assure you, they were all very nice and wholesome of their kind. Also there were toasts hot and cold, muffins and crumpets,

of course—the latter are called "pikelets" at Bradfield—breads new and old, and brown and white, and a wonderful array of jams and marmalades set forth in glass dishes; tea and coffee *ad libitum*, and Epps's cocoa for those who were under homœopathic treatment. Over the tea-cups the ladies waxed eloquent and confidential, and by the time they reached the drawing-room again they were ready to form themselves into little cliques, and discuss all sorts of questions, and pronounce grave opinions on every subject, from predestination to the latest receipt for pickling or preserving.

The young ladies naturally sought each other's society, so that the matrons were left free to discuss any little matters pertaining to their own order. As the gentlemen dropped in the conversation became more general; the piano was opened and sacred music proposed—that is to say, it was understood that the songs were to be all sacred, while the instrumental performance might be secular. Now and then a song was ventured, such as "The Last Rose of Summer," "Those Evening Bells," or "The Better Land," and met with general acclaim; but the stock performances were from Handel's "Messiah," and I only wonder that Handel's ghost, after the fashion of ghosts nowadays, did not rap the floor or the walls or tilt the tables, just to testify his disgust, and awe his presumptuous renderers into silence. You might *play* anything you chose, save *polkas:* airs from "Faust" and "Robert le Diable;" overtures to the most improper operas, "La Traviata" included; anything and everything, from the "Hallelujah Chorus," down to variations on "Sich a Getting-up Stairs" or "Pop goes the Weasel."

About eight o'clock wine, and fruits, and biscuits were brought in; but, generally speaking, the Oswaldians knew better than to spoil their appetites for supper, the great event of the evening. A series of these parties took place every winter, every lady of any position taking it in turn to issue invitations to all the most respectable, *alias* wealthy, pew-holders of St. Oswald's.

It was Mrs. Aston's turn, or so she believed, to inaugurate the course; though Mrs. Jennings did think that she, in virtue of her husband's former services as church-warden, and her own great devotion to church interests,

ought to have had the precedence. And Mrs. Aston was a widow, and had never been very active in the parish; but then it was allowed on all hands that she was "extremely genteel," and that Maggie, her only daughter, was clever, and the beauty of the congregation.

Of course Dr. and Mrs. Bethell were to be invited, also their eldest daughter. There was a question about Fanny: she was only seventeen, and she could not be said to be properly "out." Mrs. Aston wished to ask her, but Maggie demurred. "It would not do," she said, "to make these parties mere juvenile affairs, and really Fanny Bethell was just a child; doubtless Mrs. Bethell would prefer her remaining at home with the younger children." That very evening after the service—it was Wednesday night—as Mrs. Aston and Maggie came out of church, they were met by Mrs. Lupin, who lived just on the other side of the square, and asked to take their "bread and cheese" with her; "for," she added, in her good-humoured way, "my husband is off to Sheffield, and won't be home these two days, and I'm that dull I could take to biting my finger-nails. And as I had a nice brace of birds in the house that wanted cooking, I told Selina to put them down for nine o'clock; and then, as it's tripe night, and I never miss it at this time of the year—Lupin's so fond of tripe—I thought I'd better order three sixpenny cuts, and have a Spanish onion or two stewed; and then, if half-a-dozen friends dropped in after service, there would be plenty for them. Come, Mrs. Aston, it's a raw night, step in. We shall have a 'feminine parliament,' as my Sam says. I asked Miss Wilkins on Sunday, and I've a friend staying with me—that is, I expect to find her come when we get in. She worships at Carvary."

Mrs. Somerville, the lady from Carvary, had arrived. Miss Wilkins was taking off her bonnet, and Mrs. Cox and Miss Phillips knocked at the door soon afterwards. Mr. Cox was to call for them at half-past ten.

The birds were done to a turn, and the sauce and the gravy were all that could be desired. Nothing ever went amiss in Mrs. Lupin's *cuisine*, and the tripe was tender and delicate, as tripe nearly always is at Bradfield, which seems to have a monopoly of the article as regards excellence, and the Spanish onions were very nice to those who were

vulgar enough to like them. Maggie eschewed both tripe and onions, and she trifled with the wing of a partridge, and half a spoonful of mashed potatoes, till Mrs. Lupin, who never could bear her dainties to be slighted, began to feel quite angry.

Mrs. Aston had already issued her invitations, and so the conversation fell naturally on the subject. "I am so glad our winter parties are beginning," said Miss Phillips, "for now we shall see a little more of the doctor and Mrs. Bethell, and know more about them, too."

"That is, if they come to all the parties," said Maggie Aston: "they are coming to *our* house, of course! they have accepted. But I am not at all certain that Bradfield festivities will suit them." Mrs. Lupin and Mrs. Cox coloured; there was something in Maggie's speech that annoyed them both. Miss Wilkins, good old soul! saw the cloud, and hastened to dispel it by starting a fresh topic. "How are you getting on at Carvary, Mrs. Somerville?" said she.

Mrs. Somerville shook her head. "We are getting into hot water already," she answered. "Mr. Stanley will never get a unanimous call to the sole pastorate, and he will not be content with anything less. So I suppose he'll have to leave. He is *not* sound, you know; he is certainly not sound!"

"Ah! where shall we find soundness in these days of error?" sighed Miss Phillips. "We are not sound at St. Oswald's; that is a melancholy fact; but we can't turn *him* out, you know. That is an undeniable advantage which you Dissenters have over us of the Establishment; if you are displeased with your minister, or if you are tired of him, and want a change, you can get rid of him. He can always be turned out somehow. Do you give him notice like a servant?"

"It seldom comes to that," said Mrs. Somerville. "If a man has any proper pride about him, he resigns the moment he finds he is not acceptable to the people; if he does not, he is *requested* to resign!"

"And if he refuse?"

"I can hardly conceive of so extreme a case, unless he has his own party in the church, and they are strong enough to fight it out. When some are for the pastor,

and some are against him, there is sure to be a pretty fierce struggle."

"What an edifying spectacle it must be!" said Maggie, with her most exasperating sneer.

"I did hope you would settle down quietly at Carvary," put in Miss Wilkins, who had friends in that community, and had often attended the chapel in the time of John Grey. "I always liked Mr. Stanley, and Mr. Grey thought very highly of him. What are his errors?"

"He does not believe in original sin,—not, at least, as he ought to do; and he does not half insist on the depravity of human nature. Then his views of the Atonement, we feel sure, are not at all what they should be. In fact, he preached a sermon last Sunday evening that alarmed the deacons so much, that they called a private meeting for Monday morning. And yet, do you know, I am not certain that he is really so unorthodox. I fancy that half of it is the way he puts it. But I hear curious little bits about your Dr. Bethell?"

"I should think you did!" replied Miss Phillips. "He says the strangest things; he comes out every now and then with something that takes away your breath. *He* does not believe in 'original sin' either; nor in what he calls the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, whatever that may be. And he puts the Bible and the History of England side by side. It is awful!"

"Mr. Stanley does not believe in an universal Deluge."

"Very few people do, I should say," remarked Mrs. Cox. "And I cannot see what it matters. Believing that the world was half drowned, or whole drowned, or only very partially drowned, as I imagine was the case, has nothing to do with our salvation."

"It has everything to do with it," said Miss Phillips, stiffly. "If you don't believe rightly, how can you do anything rightly?"

"Ah! but the question arises, what is it to believe rightly?"

"To believe what is *written*, just as it stands. I believe that the entire world was drowned, that the whale swallowed Jonah, and vomited him up again in three days; and if the Bible told me Jonah swallowed the whale, I should believe it just the same."

"Happily the Bible does not say it," said Mrs. Lupin; "the Bible never talks nonsense. And I think no people undermine the authority of the Scriptures so much as those who go in for implicit credence and reverence for the exact words."

"Ah! that is Dr. Bethell's dangerous teaching. The Bible is the religion of Protestants. I should not wonder if he turned out to be a Jesuit."

"I do not go with Dr. Bethell in all he sets forth," put in Mrs. Lupin. "Now, what he said the other Sunday quite upset me, and it upset my Lupin too. Says Dr. Bethell, 'Baptism does not *make* an infant a child of God, it only *declares* the fact'! Now, the Church Catechism says, 'Wherein I was made a member of Christ, *a child of God*,' &c. And which is likeliest to be right—Dr. Bethell, who is not yet fifty years old, or the Church Catechism, which has stood for centuries, I should like to know? I don't like new-fangled notions, never did!"

"One greater than Dr. Bethell was told that He was not yet fifty years old," said Mrs. Cox. "And yet He knew the truth; He *was* the Truth, though those arrogant Jews, who thought they and they alone held all the truth, taunted Him with His inexperience."

"The comparison is blasphemous," whispered Miss Phillips to Maggie. "We should never have heard such a speech in Parson Bunn's time."

"Dear me! Do you remember Parson Bunn?" whispered Maggie. "He died when I was in the nursery."

"No, of course I don't know much about him; but then I've heard my mother say," &c., quoth Miss Phillips, ready to bite her lips at her mistake.

She did remember poor old Leo very well; he had prepared her for confirmation, and a very hard time she had of it, and horribly scared she was at the prospect of leading a Christian life, which he painted in the gloomiest colours.

"But," said Mrs. Aston, "Mr. Bunn and Mr. Grover both taught that baptism did *not* make us the children of God. The benighted Romanists teach that doctrine, I know, and so do the Puseyites, poor blinded creatures! but *we*, whose eyes are opened, know that it is no such thing."

"Then why in the world is it in the Catechism?" said Maggie, tartly. "We are all made to learn that, and then we are told we must not believe it."

"It is quite capable of explanation," urged Miss Phillips, who was not at all sure whether the Church Catechism was not part and parcel of Holy Writ. She held fast to it, every word and syllable, from "What is thy name?" to "in charity with all men." And yet she accepted the Evangelical teaching of the new birth. The two doctrines *did* seem to clash, but she was quite sure they could be reconciled *somehow*.

"Everything may be explained, if you come to that," said Mrs. Cox. "I begin to think, with our rector, that the things which need no explanation—the love of God, and the revelation of that love through Christ—are the only great and central truths about which we need really concern ourselves. Truths and untruths alike can all be explained away if only you explain long enough and cleverly enough. Infidels explain away one set of facts, Romanists another, Unitarians another, Evangelicals another; but nothing and nobody can explain away God's love or our duty to Him."

Nobody answered; all felt that they were treading on dangerous ground.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Mrs. Aston; "it won't do to have our young people corrupted by unsound doctrine. I think we must be very wary; I propose that we get from Dr. Bethell an exact statement of his views."

"*Après?*" said Maggie, airing a little bit of French, which her mother did not understand.

"And what then!" asked Mrs. Lupin, coming unconsciously to the rescue with a free translation. "*Then* we must speak out, and *act;* in the meantime, we must watch—watch and pray; and Maggie shall take notes of the sermons, and of the Wednesday evening lectures."

Little did Dr. Bethell, going quietly upstairs to bed that night, dream of the evil devised against him at that snug little supper party; little did he foresee all the trials and vexations that were to arise out of that inconsequent babble of women's tongues. But "trifles make the sum of human things," and a mighty movement may often be traced to insignificant causes.

CHAPTER XI.

"IS GOD LIKE THAT?"

"NORA!" said Miss Lane, several days after her niece's arrival, "I have a few things to speak to you about. I have just been to your room, and, in the first place, it is not tidy, though that is not what I have chiefly to mention. I must request you to put away those idolatrous and most objectionable Popish gewgaws which you have stuck up. I suppose you say your prayers to that cross?"

Nora opened wide her violet eyes. "No, indeed, aunt, I do not; I say my prayers to God. Is it my silver cross you mean? That was mamma's, and papa let me have it in my room after she died."

"Nevertheless, you must put it away. Your papa was not a converted character, and it did not matter of course to him. But it matters to me—I detest Popery—and I will not have the Mystery of Iniquity set up in *my* house! I am afraid, child, you have the mark of the Beast upon you."

Nora was fairly puzzled. Fortunately, she had not in the least understood her aunt's allusions. If she had, her quick, impetuous temper would have been aroused. She only said: "Well, aunt, since you wish it, I will put it away out of sight; but I do not think it does me any harm."

"It is an idol," replied Miss Lane, sternly.

"How can it be an idol, if I do not bow down to it?" asked Nora, timidly. There was something in her aunt's tone that made her feel very much inclined to cry. Harsh tones and severe glances were new to her, poor child; and the first look into Miss Lane's solemn face, and the first sound of her hard, rasping voice had made the girl's nerves quiver. Sarah had expected to receive a child, and she found that her charge was a woman, in appearance at

least, and she showed her disappointment very plainly. It was part of Miss Lane's creed never to disguise her feelings—self-control she disdained to practise, and to have made a pretence of patience when impatience predominated, would have been, in her estimation, rank hypocrisy.

"And those pictures you must take down," pursued Miss Lane; "they are as Papistical as they can be! Indeed, I think pictures in a bedroom are out of place altogether—great nonsense, in fact. What do the pictures represent?"

"One is Saint Theresa——"

"*Saint!* Sh-h-h." I despair of writing the peculiar utterance wherewith Miss Lane was wont to express her contempt for whatever did not please her. It was a compound of "Pish," "Pshaw," "Ugh," and half a dozen other interjections equally polite. It was very much like the noise one makes when one wishes to chase away an intrusive cat. She knew nothing whatever about St. Theresa; but she strongly objected to her being styled a saint.

"And the other is the Blessed Virgin."

"The *what?*" and Sarah looked horrified beyond measure. "That I should ever live to hear such an expression in *my* house! Your father has indeed much to answer for. Why, you are a Papist; it is of no use denying it."

"If you mean a Catholic, aunt, I am not that; I told you so in my letter. But what have I said?"

"Did you not call Mary the Blessed Virgin?"

"I have always heard her called so," replied Nora, bewildered. "Everybody in France calls her *La Sainte Vierge*."

"France is a wicked idolatrous country, and there is some excuse for your Romish bringing up. But now you are in a Protestant country, and with people who profess the truth, you must drop all those heathenish expressions."

"But was not the Virgin *blessed?*" inquired Nora, greatly wondering. "I thought you sang in your churches, 'all generations shall call me blessed!'"

"Yes; but it does not mean THAT."

"Does it not? I thought it did. What does it mean, aunt?"

"Well! of course, she was blessed in one sense; but, in another, she is not more than other women."

"Papa always taught me that; he made me understand that the *Blessed* Virgin," said Nora, stoutly, "was not to be worshipped—not to be prayed to. But for all that, she is 'Mary—mother,' and she is to be spoken of with respect. She is no goddess; but I cannot see that she is not 'blessed.'"

"You will know better when you have been here a little while. I wish there were sounder teaching in the Church; I am not at all sure that our new rector is a converted person; and yet I do not like to leave St. Oswald's, I have attended there all my life, and I knew it in its most palmy days. Oh! the congregations we used to have, and the solemn sermons, and the fixed attention! He was a wonderful man, was Mr. Bunn."

Now Nora did not know what her aunt meant by "a converted person." She had not yet been a week at Salamanca House, but she had heard the expression more times than she could count. And it seemed to her that scarcely anybody, except her aunt, Mr. Bunn, the late Mrs. Lane—Nora's grandmother—and a very few others, were or had been *converted*. At the same time she gathered from her aunt's remarks, that people who were not converted were under a sort of ban, and also, that it was extremely difficult, if not impossible in some cases, to undergo this mysterious process called conversion; still, if Dr. Bethell were *un*converted, she thought it could not matter very much, for he was clearly a good, God-fearing man, very anxious for the spiritual welfare of others, and full of kindness and sympathy for those who were in distress.

"But Dr. Bethell is a very good man?" she said, hesitatingly. "I am sure of it! He loves God, and he loves to please Him. I liked to hear him talk, much—so much. When I was so sad the morning we came away from Dover, he said, 'My child, you have still a Father; one who will never leave you, never forsake you, never turn away His face from you. Love Him, and trust Him, and you will be at peace, and happy. Only seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all things needful shall be added to you: those are God's own words, uttered when

He took upon Himself the form of a servant, and came down to die for sinful men.' I do not know what '*converted*' means, but I should say he is good, very good, monsieur your curé."

"I will find you a tract on the subject of conversion; but you tell me you read the New Testament; so you ought to know that to be converted is to be *born again*."

"Papa said that meant becoming good; getting the spirit to wish to be and to do what is well-pleasing to the Lord."

"It means much more than that. I see you have to begin at the beginning, Nora. Well, you know God is very angry with us till we are converted, and nothing that we can do, however good it may be in itself, can possibly please Him. He is angry now with you."

"Is He? Ah! what have I done?"

"Child, you have done a thousand wicked things; your heart is deceitful, and there is no good in you. You were born in sin, you grew up in sin, and you have done nothing but sin ever since you were a baby. And if you died this moment, He would send you to hell, because He is a just God, and you have sinned and not repented. Till your sins are pardoned, you are in danger of eternal damnation."

"Are you sure that God is angry with me, and means to send me to hell?"

"Quite sure; the Bible says it, and the Bible is the only infallible guide in such cases. Still, if you weep and pray, and bewail your iniquities, God will forgive you for Christ's sake. Nora, I have known people wretched for weeks and months, even for years, despairing of salvation, yet crying out day and night for God's mercy, and longing to be accepted in Christ. I have known them go about their business with sinking heart, not caring for food or friends, or anything the world can give. I have gone through it myself."

And Sarah spoke tremulously. She was really in earnest. She quite believed that in order to be *saved*, one must go through a certain process of mind, just as one must go through all the phases and symptoms of any malady that one has taken. That there should not be a weary struggle, a long anguish of darkness and all the misery of despair, before God showed the light of His countenance, she

could not comprehend. The loving Saviour, the pitiful Father were to her almost as shadowy as Buddha or Siva.

"Is God like that?" said Nora, mournfully. "I thought He was so kind; I thought He was '*our Father*,' and fathers are never hard upon their children, though they may be displeased and punish the faults they know will make them grow up badly. My papa always forgave me when I asked him, for I can be very naughty! Oh! how I wish now I had not troubled my papa so much. How can one know when one has repented enough?"

"God will give you an answer of peace when once you see your own vileness properly, and believe in His Son."

"The answer of peace is sure to come at last, I suppose? But I think it is very hard of God to keep people in misery and suspense so long. I wish you had not told me, aunt, because when I said my prayers this morning I did love God. Now I am not sure that I love Him so well."

"Hush! That is wicked—profane. You *must* love God."

"It is very difficult, I should think, to make one's self love anybody. But when this answer of peace comes, is it all right for ever afterwards? Are you always quite sure that your sins are forgiven, and that you are going straight to heaven? Do you know for certain, aunt, that it is all right?"

Sarah shrank away, partly in displeasure, partly in pain of soul. No, she did *not* know that all was well with her. She hoped, and sometimes hope prevailed, that God for Christ's sake would mercifully pardon her, and take her after death into His own glorious kingdom; but too often fears and doubts had the ascendancy, and she went mourning because she sought in vain for the "witness of the Spirit." She dreaded death, and yet she was not greatly in love with life. If only she could be *sure* that heaven was her portion! And sometimes, in the silence of her chamber where she prayed, even with cries and tears, she had terrible visions of the world of darkness, and of the horrors of the last day. She had learned theology first and the Gospel afterwards, which would not have mattered so much if she had not brought her theology to interpret the Gospel. And in this theology of hers—it was not her fault; it had been impressed upon her from her

earliest childhood—*hell* was the deepest truth. Consequently, though she and her teachers also would have turned in horror from so monstrous a proposition, God's love was not so deep as hell. The devil was, on the whole, stronger than Christ, for only *few* would be saved, while the many were hurried to the abyss of lost, tormented souls. Escape from the awful doom of the impenitent, from "the wrath to come," had been all her life her chief concern. It had never occurred to her to give to God the love of the child instead of that of the slave. Christ had made her free, but she could not read the charter of her freedom. Her chains were actually loosed; they might have fallen from her at any hour, and left her to go on her way rejoicing, had she not herself clung to them, dreading, because she did not comprehend, the liberty of God's children. She was, perhaps, the worst specimen of Parson Bunn's teaching; the most unhappy victim of the falsehoods which, in God's name, he had taught as truly essential to salvation.

Her home training had been most wretched; it was cold, hard, loveless; her father had been a stern tyrant, her mother an unfeeling, though sincere fanatic; her only brother she had been taught to shun; friends, she had scarcely any; for, in the first place, Mr. Lane's desire was to keep his children apart from acquaintances, lest haply they might learn the secret of rebellion; and, in the second place, Sarah Lane was not the woman to make friends, or, having made them, to retain them. She was too dogmatic, too obstinate, too violent in her opinions, which on every point were *ultra;* too denunciatory and harsh in her judgments; too *contemptuous* to have or to keep true friends. Nothing tends to estrangement, to isolation—nothing is so well remembered as expressed contempt.

It would not have mattered so much had Sarah Lane lived and died a solitary life; but now was thrown upon her the responsibility of great wealth, and the still greater responsibility of being sole guardian to a young, ardent, impetuous, high-spirited girl, who had scarcely one idea in common with her relation. Nora had been taught to hate bigotry and narrow-mindedness, and Sarah had been steeped in both. Nora had walked always in the sunshine,

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f what was passing, and wondered
before her mistress and pretty Miss
l hostilities.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BEGINNING OF NORA'S TROUBLES.

Nora, not without an inward struggle, took down her
es and put away her silver cross, which she locked
with some other treasures that she privately determined
r aunt should never see. If Miss Lane were disappointed
n Nora, Nora was equally disappointed in Miss Lane.
Aunt Sarah by no means satisfied her ideas of a blood-
relation—nearest of kin, in fact; and she sometimes
wondered how brother and sister could possibly be so dis-
similar as were her aunt and the father whom she had
idolised, and whose memory was now enshrined in the
most sacred recesses of her heart. Already she began to
discern that he had not been in good odour at Salamanca
House—not since the days of his earliest youth; that he
had been looked upon as the black sheep of the family;
that he had left home under some sort of cloud; that all

mention of him had been shunned for many and many a year. And already Nora's heart was hardened, and the spirit of resistance was silently gathering strength. She had meant to be so good, so patient, so gentle! She had fully resolved to conciliate this dreadful aunt, whose stern, hard face had frightened her from the very first.

"I will make her love me!" she said to herself the day after her arrival. "I will be so obedient, so thoughtful, and I will *not* give way to my temper, my wicked, tiresome temper, which poor papa always did say was the real 'Lane temper!' which seems to be about as shocking as a temper can be. *He* had the sweetest temper in the world, poor dear; he was only a little passionate when people did very much provoke him. He did say to me that he was hasty, which meant, not that he continually made haste, but that he was easily made to be savage. Bah! he was never savage, only sharp and cross now and then when he was greatly tormented. He had great patience with me when I was a naughty girl—and what a naughty girl I used to be! I will be good now, for perhaps he sees me. Likewise I will strive to please the good Lord, my Father in heaven. Ah! my dear papa is in heaven also; there is no doubt about that; though *ma tante*, she speaks as if she thought he might not be there; but I mean the great Father who made us all, and who looks that we should love Him and do His will. Ah! I *will* be good. I will be passionate never more."

Alas! how easily made and how quickly registered are good resolutions, and how much more easily and quickly are they broken! Nora was not, and never had been, a pattern child. Her temper was her greatest stumbling-block. She was passionate, furious upon occasion, and in her passion she could say very hard and spiteful things. But she was generous, forgiving, and oh, how loving! At this period of her life anything might have been done with her had she only fallen into kind, gentle hands, and lived under a wise administration. And Nora was not only passionate but obstinate—obstinate as her old grandfather, whom she had never seen, and whose shut-up room, as she passed it continually on her way to her own chamber, filled her with a strange and undefined awe, not unmingled with superstitious fear. Nora had no idea how much of the

stern old man's spirit was in her; she did not guess that she had inherited from him the "iron will" of which she had heard so much. Her own father had rather lacked firmness. Not from him came the strong, unbending will, the sturdy determination, the unconquerable spirit. But it frequently happens that mental and physical disease alike leap over a generation, and spring up afresh, and with all their native vigour, in the children's children. It is one of Nature's grand laws that so it should be; taint of body and taint of mind are sure to be transmitted, either directly or indirectly, unto the third and fourth generation; and so, and only so, are the sins of the fathers visited upon the children. Though to each generation are given chances, fresh opportunities, special redeeming advantages, into the philosophy of which we cannot enter now, only remembering that all such are the gift of God, the merciful Father and the Lord of all, from whom cometh every good gift of things new and old.

So Nora was a Lane of the old stock, though she herself did not know it. But then there was an impetuosity and enthusiasm about her which came not from the Lanes. The Lanes, excepting always that waif and stray and pariah, Nora's own papa, were unloved and unloving. They did not love, they could not love, for selfishness interpenetrated their whole being; and true love and pure selfishness never go together, any more than midnight shade and golden noon. And the Lanes were self-centred, self-absorbed, cruelly self-conscious; they conjugated the verb "to live" in all its moods and tenses, but they made of it a miserably *defective* verb, for they never went beyond the first person, and that generally in the singular number. There are a good many Lanes in the world, I am afraid; indeed, they may be called a representative family; if they were not, it would scarcely be worth my while to write about them, for they were what in slang phrase one would style "a most unpleasant lot."

Had Nora been more like or more unlike her aunt, they might have got on together—*somehow*. It would have been "somehow," in any case, for to "get on," to continue to live under the same roof as Sarah Lane, and own her authority as mistress, could never be either easy or comfortable. Aunt and niece had both the same fault of

temper, the same gift of firmness—on the one side sedulously cultivated, on the other rapidly forced into the curse of obstinacy. But Nora could love—ay, and love passionately, deeply, self-sacrificingly, too! Nora was liberal in her ideas, broad in her conceptions of things and people. Nora loved brightness, and sunshine, and pretty things. She was naturally æsthetic, instinctively a beauty-worshipper, and she was not one whose convictions could be forced. Also I must confess she had strong prejudices—she was only sixteen, remember—and her antipathies were violent, and perhaps unreasonable, as were her affections.

Now Sarah knew nothing about loving. She had had few opportunities of fostering the sentiment, not one of really acquiring the passion. It was quite as much her misfortune as her fault. She did not care about pretty things, though she rather liked fine colours and glaring contrasts, such as blue and orange, red and green, which told that she might have been something far different under different circumstances. And, above all things, she hated expense, and loved thrift and economy. It was her delight to try to make things go just a little farther than they would; and I feel sure that if she had been told, and brought to believe, that her eternal salvation depended upon her never saving another sixpence, the struggle would have been sore as to whether she should risk her soul, or gratify the master-passion of her being. Hoarding was, perhaps, Sarah's primary vice. The next was an intolerable littleness of mind, and a propensity—always gratified—to bring everything to her own standard, to require people to look through her spectacles, to measure good and evil by her own foot-rule, which, by some enormous self-delusion, she really believed to be that of Holy Writ.

And now she had caught a humming-bird, and she wanted to put it into a cage and make it sing certain tunes, and draw its own water like a piping bullfinch. A lovely wild flower of the woods had been sent to her by the great Head Gardener, and she was going, if she could, to grow it like a cabbage, or to clip it into the shape she most approved, like the box and yew trees of obsolete topiarists. In short, she had made up her mind that Nora should be

domesticated, practical, grave, and sober, and, as regarded religious thought, of the same complexion as her own.

The November days passed slowly and sadly away. It rained continually, the streets were muddy, no one called. Nora began to wonder how she should endure her life if all the years to come were to be like this. She was quickly accommodated with plenty of sewing, for her aunt soon discovered that she was not well provided with clothes; and as she had always made every garment she wore with her own fingers, she expected Nora to do the same. There was no great harm in that; a woman cannot too well understand plain needlework, though Sarah need not have forced the girl into a living sewing-machine. Day after day the two sat in that dull sitting-room, with its poppy-coloured roses, and the old-fashioned bureau, and the eight-day clock, which ticked more aggravatingly than ever. And Nora looked out through the rain at the long, low roof of the kitchen; at the green water-butt, at the dismal garden walk; and at the five lanky, grimy, leafless poplars, which were not at all like "Mariana's" one poplar—"silver green with gnarled bark," but stiff, dirty, spindly, altogether unlike any trees Nora had ever seen before.

Nora knew the ballad of "Mariana" very well, and sometimes she repeated to herself the refrain, "My life is dreary, my life is dreary; I am a-weary, a-weary," though she never added, "I would that I were dead." Her life was too young and fresh for that; her days were all before her; truly the present was unlovely enough; but what might not a possible future hold for her delight? And then Nora, though as romantic a little soul as ever lived, was not morbid. Body and mind were both alike sound and healthy, and her views of things, though frequently imperfect and incorrect, were never weak and diseased. So now she sewed away at the interminable seam her aunt had given her,—not in very sempstress-like fashion, I must confess, for some of her stitches "grinned," as little girls say, and she found it very difficult not to "pucker." Still, she went on with her task, disliking it intensely, but doing it pleasantly nevertheless. A year ago she would not have sat down quietly to do what she did not like.

"I am improving," she said to herself; "I am getting to be patient and sensible, and I am learning to sew; only I never shall make the two sides of this wretched calico come right, and the needle does prick my finger so often that it is full of little holes, and so sore."

Now, Miss Lane was a person subject to attacks of temper—or moods, perhaps. They came on generally without much previous warning; very much as influenza, measles, or ague come on; and they had their course, lasting sometimes several days, though occasionally—but seldom—going off in a few hours. But while they lasted nothing could please her, and she worried, and harassed, and tormented everybody who was so unfortunate as to be within her sphere. Hitherto she had had only Rhoda upon whom to vent her feelings; now there was another small maid in the kitchen, whose delinquencies and shortcomings were her mistress's favourite theme of conversation; and, best of all, there was Nora in the parlour. Nora, who had a thousand faults, who was ignorant, and young, and foolish. Nora, who was dependent upon her for bread and cheese, and who owed her the obedience of a daughter.

It was a wretched winter day; cold, foggy, and dark, and Sarah, who had gone to bed overnight "all right," as her household expressed it, got up in the morning in about as vile a temper as you can imagine. She came down "looking awful," Rhoda declared; "as black as thunder!" said Ann, her coadjutor. And she went, according to custom, straight to the kitchen, where, of course, everything was in disorder; the fire sulky, the kettle far from boiling, the coffee-pot not quite clean, some of last night's supper-things left upon the dresser; all of which tended to aggravate the symptoms of poor Sarah's malady. Nor was she contented to observe merely what came under her eye; on these infelicitous occasions it was her custom to make a general tour of inspection from garret to cellar, in search of dirt in corners, utensils neglected, and dust accumulated. And, of course, sooner or later, she found what she wanted, and that was a pretext for the vials of her wrath to empty themselves; a text whereupon to found a discourse, to the which a sermon to a condemned criminal was nothing. Woe to the

unlucky wights upon whom those avalanches of words should fall!

Nora was not yet down—early rising was not, and never had been, one of her accomplishments, so she escaped the first droppings of the cloud, only, however, to aggravate the fury of the tempest. Rhoda and Ann got the first sprinkling; Rhoda did not mind much, for she was used to it.

"Hard words don't hurt me," she was wont to say, when her friends wondered how she could put up with it. "I just let her go on, nag-nag-nag, till she runs herself down like an alarm-bell. If she beat me—and I know she would like to sometimes—that would be different; I shouldn't stand it. I shouldn't give it her back again—that would be to put myself on a level with her; but I shouldn't stop! As it is, I don't mind, only she do make me saucy now and then. Flesh and blood can't stand all she says, because she carries on with it so long; and if only she wouldn't mix up religion with it, and preach to us about our sins, while all the time she's the biggest sinner going!"

But Ann, who had not half Rhoda's good temper, nor anything like half Rhoda's good sense, stared open-mouthed at her mistress, got cross herself, became perverse, and finally defiant. It was a relief to both the young girls when breakfast was at last on the table, and Miss Lane pouring out the coffee; but Nora had not yet made her appearance.

"Well!" said Ann, when she and Rhoda were left alone in the kitchen. "I never! Why, she's enough to turn all the cream in the parish! What's made her like that?"

"It's her way. She gets out of bed the wrong side, I suppose. She can't help it, I believe."

"How soon will it be over?"

"Not before night. Perhaps it will go on to-morrow and next day. I never knew the fit last longer than three days running; though Mrs. Pegg—the woman that comes to help, you know—does say that *once* it went on for a full week, and was so bad that she told her right out she would give up the place if things did not get more comfortable. Mrs. Pegg used to come here in Mrs. Lane's time, and so she knows the family."

"That was the missis's ma, warn't it? Was she like her?"

"I never saw her; she died before I was born. She was no great things, I should say—a slow, dull, pottering sort of woman. One that seemed to find no pleasure in life, but very religious according to her notion."

"I don't believe in religion; do you?"

"Of course I do. It's the one thing that makes life worth having. Don't go and rail at religion, now."

"But the missis is religious. She talked to me about the Judgment-day only yesterday till I shivered and creeped. And she says I'm full of sins; I'd a great mind to up and tell her to mind her own business, for I wasn't. I'm as good as her any day, and gooder! I'd be ashamed to have my monkey up, and keep it up for three days, all about nothing. If that's religion, I don't want none."

"It is *not* religion," said Rhoda, gravely; "it is the want of it. Religious people may be hasty, and get into a pet like others; but they won't keep in it. They won't go on making all around them miserable any more than they'd plan a robbery. Religion not only makes people bright and happy themselves, but it makes them try their best to make others happy.,'

"I bepities Miss Nora."

"So do I. *She'll* have a nice day of it, I'll be bound! Her aunt will nag at her and nag at her till she doesn't know her right hand from her left, poor dear! But I say, Ann, it doesn't do us any good to sit here picking out the missis's faults. We are going to have a black day of it, I warn you, for I know which way the wind blows; so let's make up our minds to it and do our bests. And I'll tell you, as soon as ever she has done her breakfast and given Miss Nora her first dose, she'll be off, up and down, looking for something to begin upon, and she'll find it, too. She'll come here first, most likely. Now, are your saucepans clean?"

"I couldn't say they are all as clean as one would like them to be."

"Then look out; you'll catch it. As for the sink, it really is as clear as a sink ought to be; but the tiles ain't red, and I'm not going to red them; I might as well wash out the coal-hole. It doesn't much matter what it is, for

the scrimmage must be now; only we needn't have anything really wrong. We are safe to be well scolded and lectured, but don't let us deserve it."

"If we must be scolded, I don't see why we shouldn't deserve it. If she's that bad-tempered, she ought to be punished for it."

"And so she is punished for it, but it's not our place to punish her. Our place is to do our duty, and if she won't do hers so much the worse for her. And I'd rather be scolded for nothing than for something."

"So wouldn't I!" replied Ann, sturdily. "If she'll say I've slighted my work, whether I have or not, why shouldn't I slight it? I may as well save myself the trouble."

"Slighting work never does save trouble in the long run. I've found that out, and we must do our work because it is our duty to. God isn't pleased with us when we don't do our very best; and if we don't try to please Him in little things, we never shall in great."

"But God never meant the missis to go on at us for next to nothing. *She* don't please Him."

"That is not for you and me to trouble about. We haven't got to answer for the missis; so now I'll wash up as quick as ever I can, and you just see if that gutter don't want swilling down. And how's the front door and the doorstep? We've got to mind the outside of the house as well as the inside. We're in for a regular row; but, as I said, don't let's deserve it—*I won't.*"

Half an hour afterwards Ann came to Rhoda.

"I say, there's Miss Nora crying ready to break her heart; why, she's sobbing again."

"I'm so sorry, but I can't help it, at least not yet. And if she cries, it is the worst thing she can do; not but what missis would force tears out of the fire-irons if she could. But I would sooner be Miss Nora; I would sooner be myself; I would sooner be the woman that sells tapes and laces, sitting in the wind in the corner of the canal-bridge, than I would be the missis with all her money. I should hate myself if I made anybody miserable, so miserable that they cried till they sobbed."

"I'd like to make the missis miserable though," replied Ann, savagely. She had had several fierce reprimands already.

"She *is* miserable. People that give way to tantrums like that are always miserable, and the older they grow the miserabler they get, unless God changes their hearts."

Ann went off, and Rhoda went on with her work, saying to herself, "I do wish the missis would be converted. She's always talking about it, but it's only talk. It would be so much more comfortable for us if she would *live* religion instead of preaching it. And it would be better for herself too in every way. She is not happy; she always looks as if she was afraid of something; and I know she is horribly afraid of God, and that makes her afraid of everything else besides. Poor missis! poor missis!"

CHAPTER XIII.

MISS BETHELL IS "WANTED."

THAT evening the young Bethells and their mother were sitting together in the drawing-room when the clock struck eight. It was a large, but not a handsome room; the vicarage belonged to the Bradfield of the first half of this century, and to this Bradfield nothing of beauty appertained. But it was as bright and cheerful a room as any one could wish to see; it was a *real* drawing-room, not a show-room dedicated to Sundays and festivals. You never shivered in it, because the fire had only been lighted a few hours before, and for the first time for some days past, for Mrs. Bethell *lived* in her drawing-room every afternoon and every evening throughout the week. It had the air of being lived in too, which some drawing-rooms never have; the books that lay about were books in actual reading, not mere annuals and albums, which only did duty upon compulsion. The piano was generally open,

and the music showed that it was continually in use, and the ladies' work-baskets, and Laura's drawing portfolio, all gave an air of occupation to the room, filling it with a radiant atmosphere of combined homeliness and elegance. Mrs. Bethell was one of the few women who knew how to impart refinement and elegance to the most essential homelinesses.

Mrs. Bethell herself was quietly at work;—what a comfortable, happy little woman she looked! Gertrude and Fanny had just finished practising papa's favourite duet, and Gertie still lingered at the piano playing over snatches of tunes, and listening to what the others were saying. Laura was drawing, and at the same time skirmishing with the school-boy Walter, who had come home that very day for the Christmas holidays. Master Herbert sat upon the hearth-rug, sharing with his pet cat the biscuits which constituted his supper; he was sitting up an hour later than usual in honour of the return of both his brothers, for Arthur had just arrived from Cambridge, and the family circle of the Bethells was complete. Mrs. Bethell looked up lovingly now and then from the flannel shirt she was manufacturing, to gaze on the dear faces gathered once more around her; it was such a joy to her to have all her children at home again. She was such a veritable mother that nothing could be quite complete while any of the children were away.

"Now, mother, I am coming to have a talk with you," said tall Arthur, flinging away his book, and drawing up a low chair to the sofa on which Mrs. Bethell sat. "How do you like Bradfield?"

"Well, my dear, you need scarcely ask; nobody save the aborigines themselves could possibly like Bradfield. It is dirty and smoky—oh, dear! so smoky!—and in many ways most unsatisfactory. But papa is getting used to the place, and I really think he may get to be fond of it in time. And his work lies here—just the kind of work he wanted; and I am content."

"I am glad of it. But London for me! There is no place on earth like London."

"I quite agree with you; but if everybody lives in London what is to become of the provinces? Now, Bradfield is a very important place—a sort of midland me-

tropolis; the population, which numbers nearly a quarter of a million, is chiefly composed of artisans and working men, who are fast becoming a mighty power in the nation. They are not men who will submit to arbitrary authority; they will not listen to any man who comes among them armed only with the credentials of prescription; but they listen gladly to the leaders whose sway over them is established by force of superior knowledge, wisdom, and sound sense. These men can never be driven, but they may be guided; they refuse to be blindly led either this way or that, but they will, I think, follow to the death a leader whom they trust and whom they know is true to them and to their cause."

"And is my father true to their 'cause,' whatever that cause may be?"

"Yes, quite true. It is his pride to be an apostle of the people, and he cannot be that unless he work for them and with them, and identify himself very largely with them. Already the mechanics of Bradfield begin to respect your father. At a great town's meeting the other night, held in our fine Town Hall—you hear I am learning to say 'our' as regards Bradfield—your father's name was called, or rather shouted, enthusiastically when some measure which he was known to have advocated was brought forward for discussion."

"Was he there?"

"No; it was service-night at St. Oswald's. He never allows public business to interfere with that."

"But is it well that my father should identify himself with these Radical reformers, whose names stink in the nostrils of the aristocracy? Bradfield has always had a bad name; it has always been considered a disaffected neighbourhood."

"What do you mean by disaffected?"

"Opposed to the powers that be."

"But the powers that be are not the powers that were. The people of England are their own rulers. Queen Victoria is our sovereign lady, but she is not an autocrat; her political power is small."

"You don't go in for a republic, *I hope?*"

"No, I do not, for the best of possible reasons—that we already have a republic without the name. The

government of England is by the people and for the people, and I prefer a sovereign to a president, who might become a perpetual dictator, and develop into a despotic tyrant, with unlimited instead of limited authority. A nation, like a family, must have a head, and we are very well off as we are, though, doubtless, if we live long enough, we shall see many great changes."

"And reading the signs of the times, as I know you do, mother dear, are you not afraid of them?"

"No. Why should I be afraid? The Lord reigneth. He will order the counsel of princes aright; and by 'princes,' I think, we ought not to understand men born in the purple only, but men of authority and influence—the men who are placed at the helm of this great country, and upon whom devolve the responsibilities of government. Let us acknowledge God in all our ways, nationally as well as individually, and our safety and honour, nay, our glory, is secure."

"Some people have such a horror of changes."

"They are foolish people, because change is an immutable law of God's universe, and nothing in this world, not even the rocks and the solid crust of the earth, remain unchanged. Besides, change, however painful it may be, means progress; and who but a limpet or an oyster objects to progress?"

"The St. Oswald's folks do," cried Fanny, who, with Gertie and Walter, had joined the circle round the sofa. "They want to go on without alteration. They are for ever moaning over the 'good old times,' the date of which nobody ever can fix. If I were an author, I would write an essay on 'the good old times.' Such stuff! As if there ever were any better times than these!"

"Any nearly so good, you mean, Fan!" cried Walter, the young Rugbeian, who was thoroughly inoculated with the Arnold spirit and tone—a youthful agitator and reformer, enthusiastic in the cause of progress. "What stupids your St. Oswaldeans must be!"

"Hush, my dear! We do not prove our wisdom by calling other people stupid. There is no narrow-mindedness equal to that which demands that all men shall think alike, and see things from the same standpoint. And,

remember, we may have lost with the past some good which the present does not afford."

"Not a bit of it, mother!" cried the youth, with all the presumption of his fifteen years and seven months. "We may move on but slowly, but we *do* move, and

'Through the ages one increasing purpose runs,
And the thoughts of men are widen'd with the process of the suns.'

Ah! I wish you could hear Charlton, our Sixth Form Second! He is going into Parliament."

"He will leave school first, I presume?" said Mrs. Bethell, with a smile.

"Of course. He has left school. He is going up to Oxford. He is entered at Oriel for the Lent term."

"And he will have to run his course at the University before he offers himself to the people?"

"Oh, yes; but he will be getting ready all the time. He is going especially to study jurisprudence and politics. I quite expect we shall live to see him Prime Minister, and then—there *will* be changes!"

"What sort of changes?"

"He means to go in for thorough reform. Church-rates are to be swept away, the Irish and the Welsh Churches are to be disestablished. Universal suffrage and the ballot, of course. He will go in, too, for women's rights, for why shouldn't they vote as well as we? Charlton says they ought to be in Parliament, in the Cabinet, and they shall be before we get into another century. Then he will take up Sanitary Reform and the Education question: every child in the United Kingdom will learn to read, and write, and cipher. The Universities, with all their emoluments, are to be thrown open to Dissenters; he has a splendid scheme for utilising pauper labour, so as to reduce the poor-rates to a minimum not worth mentioning. He will get rid *in toto* of the Income-tax, largely reduce the National Debt, and ——"

"Stop, stop, my dear! My weak woman's brain can bear no more. Mr. Charlton will require at least three ordinary men's lives to achieve all he proposes to himself. How old is he?"

"Nineteen last birthday."

"And perhaps before he is twenty-nine he will look with shame and horror on his present aspirations. As he is, I believe, of a good old influential county family, and the son of a rich man, he will, I dare say, in due time take his seat in the House of Commons; but I should not be in the least surprised if he espoused high Tory interests, upheld Church-rates, and denounced Dissenters."

"Oh! mother, you don't know Charlton."

"But I know how prone we are, in the days of our youth, to make up our opinion into bundles, and tie them together, endorsed and docketed, with red tape, and in after years how surely we untie them, and make them up again so differently, that they cease to be the identical bundles in which we took so much youthful pride."

"Is it foolish, then, when we are quite young, to make plans and form our own opinions?"

"Not at all! The mind must go through a certain process of growth and development as well as the body. Little children must tumble down and hurt themselves a few times before they can walk firmly, and they generally burn their poor little fingers, and cut and pinch themselves with edge-tools before they understand the use and abuse of certain dangerous requisites."

"Well, mother, I don't think Charlton will change any more than I, and I am quite sure I shall not."

Mrs. Bethell only smiled as she stroked her boy's bright curls; not that smile of calm superiority which so often exasperates young people, but a smile half playful, half tender, and wholly maternal, which seemed to say, "All right, my boy, I do not doubt you, but we shall see!"

"We are trying to get up a Psalmody class," said Gertie to her eldest brother. "The singing at St. Oswald's is something excruciating. But we are told that St. Oswald's was always celebrated for its superior congregational singing, and that we had better not try to introduce modern innovations."

"What sort of singing do these people affect?"

"Loud, bawling singing, I should say, for everybody sings at the top of his or her voice. Modulation is unthought of; time is quite a secondary consideration, one person getting a note in advance, and another falling a

note behind; and getting out of tune is not of the slightest importance. And they like florid chants; I am sure that thing they have to the *Magnificat* would do duty equally well as a polka or as a *galoppe*, if played in dance time, and duly accented.

"And the hymn tunes?" asked Arthur.

Gertrude shook her head, and Fanny groaned.

"I'll tell you," cried Laura. "'Calcutta,' 'Cranbrook,' 'Lydia,' 'Devizes'—oh, how they do *scream* 'Devizes!' And then 'Cranbrook'—oh, Arthur, you will roar when you hear—

'Grace, 'tis a char-har-har-ming sound!'

If it is char-harming, it is certainly not charming."

"I hope Arthur will feel too much reverence to 'roar,' Laura," gently reproved Mrs. Bethell. "You must remember that these florid tunes are to some old people inseparably associated with the hymns they have loved and sung for half a century; they are not to them vulgar and unmusical; they are simply part and parcel of the worship in which they have joined in heart and soul for perhaps a lifetime. We shall have to be very careful how we depose 'Lydia' and 'Cranbrook,' and the old rattling chants that you so much despise. We had better have the worst possible singing than hurt the feelings of any of our fellow-worshippers. I would rather put up with 'Devizes,' which in itself I abominate, to the end of my days, than vex anybody to whom it is a precious and hallowed strain."

"But, mamma, you cannot mean that we are to put up with what we have now? Must we not try to introduce improvements? I know papa wishes it."

"By all means introduce all the improvements you can, but do it prudently and kindly. Do not attack these poor, worn-out old tunes, which will die a natural death of themselves in a few more years; but rather try, by degrees, to educate the ears of our musical, or rather unmusical friends, and give them something so much better than that which they now applaud so highly that they shall be constrained to accept the amendment."

"They never will!" said pert Miss Laura. "They are such donkeys."

"I call that rude, now!" said Herbert, rising up from

his lair on the hearth-rug, with his cat in his arms. "Mamma, should Laura call live people donkeys?"

"Certainly not, my dear. Laura knows she was wrong. But you must go to bed—why! it is almost nine o'clock—quite time for little birds and little boys to be sound asleep in their nests."

"It is not quite nine, mamma, and you did say that I might sit up till nine, because Arthur and Walter were come home, and I am not the least bit sleepy."

"As I said you might sit up till nine, you may; but you must go, Herbert, as soon as the clock has struck. Ah! you are gaping, my child; nine o'clock is too late for little boys."

"I am sure I am not tired; I could sit up till eleven. I often gape without being sleepy," replied Master Herbert, who could scarcely keep his eyes open; but, child-like, he made it a point of honour not to confess his weariness.

"How it does rain!" said Walter. "It has either drizzled or poured all day long, and now it is coming down like one o'clock."

"How can rain come down like one o'clock? pray explain!" cried the irrepressible Laura. "What nonsense you boys do learn at school."

"No more nonsense than you girls learn at home. I meant, of course, that the rain was coming down in torrents, and the wind is rising too; what a wild night, to be sure!"

"I am glad we are all at home," said Mrs. Bethell. "Papa was going out, but he thought he would stay and finish his Sunday morning's sermon. He was going to Salamanca House."

"Oh! to Miss Lane's!" interrupted Gertie. "I almost wish he had, for we have heard nothing of Nora for ever so long. Still, I should not have liked papa to be out in all this storm. How it *does* come down!"

Herbert got behind the curtains, and, looking out, reported that the square was quite empty of passers-by, that the gutters were flowing over the pavements, and that the middle of the road was like a river. "And I am glad we are not out in the wet, dear pussy!" he continued, stroking his purring favourite. "I do believe, though,

there is some one coming up by Mrs. Lucas's—somebody without an umbrella, too. I should not like it to be me, and I should not like it to be you, pussy!"

"Mamma," said Gertie, "if you do not object, do you think we might invite Nora here for Christmas? It must be so dull for her with only her aunt."

"Papa has spoken of it already, my dear, and he would have asked Miss Lane to let her come to us next Wednesday, which is Christmas-eve, you know, if he had gone to Salamanca House to-night. We thought of keeping her till the New Year."

"That disagreeable old aunt will never let her come," put in Laura.

"I am afraid not," was Fanny's rejoinder. "Oh, Arthur, she is so lovely!"

"Who?—the redoubtable Miss Lane, whom Laura calls disagreeable?"

"No, indeed! Miss Lane is extremely ugly," quickly answered Laura. "She looks as if she would eat one up. She will eat somebody up some day, I expect! Somebody will go in some day and find only one of Nora's beautiful curls, and, perhaps, the tip of her little finger lying on the carpet."

"Is this wonderful Miss Lane an ogress?"

The girls laughed and nodded; but Mrs. Bethell gravely shook her head. "My dears, I cannot allow you to sit and defame your neighbours. If we cannot say any good of poor Miss Lane, let us say no evil. Laura, my child, you must learn to restrain your tongue. It is a more unruly member than it was a month ago; and I warn you, that if you continue to speak so freely, so carelessly, and so uncharitably, you will ere long get yourself into a scrape."

Laura blushed, conscious that the reproof was merited. She knew that she sinned in speech oftener than in any other way. While Arthur inquired, "It is the niece, then, who is so lovely?"

"Yes; it is Nora. Is it not a sweet name?—though her real name is Leonora. And she has a wonderful voice—a clear, pure, silvery soprano, only it wants cultivation," said Fanny.

"And she is altogether charming," chimed in Gertie.

"*I* think her perfectly beautiful, and so does mamma. Maggie Aston is nothing to her, though I must say Maggie is quite a picture."

"Really," said Arthur, "I had no idea I was in for so much luck. Two rival beauties, and lots of pretty girls besides, I hope. Please to describe Maggie and Nora, that I may know them when I see them. I fancy I shall like Nora best: photograph her first, if you please, Gertie."

But ere Gertrude could say more than that Nora was moderately tall, slender in figure, and graceful in style, Herbert, now wide awake, and in his excitement squeezing pussy till she made audible remonstrance, rushed from behind the curtains, exclaiming, "She is coming here! She stood for ever so long under the gas-lamp, and then she ran up the steps to the front door, and there she is ringing the bell!"

"Who? What are you talking about?" asked Mrs. Bethell, who had forgotten all about the solitary figure out in the rain.

"Why, that woman I saw with no umbrella in all the pouring, pelting rain."

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Bethell, compassionately. "Somebody wants papa, I am afraid; there is some one in trouble, or dying perhaps, and he will have to go out after all. I must go and help him on with his overcoat. Listen, my dears."

The door opened, and Cobb made his appearance.

"You are wanted, if you please, Miss Bethell," said he, addressing Gertrude.

"Who wants me? Oh, one of my Sunday class, I dare say. There must be something the matter."

"No, ma'am," replied Cobb respectfully. "I do not think it is a person of that sort. It is a young woman, but she looks like a young lady, though she has no umbrella and no bonnet on—only a shawl over her head, and the wet is running off her in streams. She looks half drowned, and she seems wild and distracted like."

Mrs. Bethell rose. "I will go with you, my dear. Where is the young person, Cobb?"

"In the morning-room, ma'am. I did not like to leave her standing in the hall, for I thought—I am not sure—

but I do think it is the same young lady that my master and Miss Bethell fetched from Dover—the young lady from foreign parts. I knew her again by her speech."

Gertrude and Mrs. Bethell looked at each other in consternation.

"Can it be?"

"Oh, surely it is not Nora?"

And mother and daughter left the room together. "The ogress has tried to eat her up, and she has run away," said Laura, in a dramatic whisper, the moment the door was shut.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GOOD SAMARITANS.

YES, it was Nora who had come through the darkness and through the pelting rain, but such a Nora as could be scarcely recognised by her wondering and troubled friends. There she stood on the hearth-rug before the smouldering fire, her long hair dripping and tangled, and the wet literally pouring from her drenched and draggled garments. She was, as Cobb said, hatless and bonnetless; an old shawl, one of Rhoda's, was thrown over her head and shoulders; she had only thin house-boots on her feet, and her hands were gloveless. As for her face, it was ghastly white, save where dark purple rims had gathered round her eyes, which were terribly swollen, as, indeed, was every feature. The girl must have cried violently for hours to disfigure herself so fully; her whole appearance was forlorn in the extreme; she had evidently rushed away from home in a state of the wildest desperation.

"Oh, madame! oh, Gertie!" she cried, as they stood before her. "Oh, pardon me that I come to you, but I

had nowhere else to go, and I could not stay longer in the house with that wicked, so wicked woman; no, not if I died in that which you name the gutter. So I fled from her—I fled out into the dark, stormy night. Oh, madame, for the sake of *le bon Dieu*, send me not back again, I pray you. But I will not go; rather will I throw myself into that black little river there, which they call canal. Oh, madame! oh, *chère* Gertrude! *ayez pitié de moi.*" And she burst out into French, pure and undiluted, speaking so passionately and so rapidly, that neither Mrs. nor Miss Bethell could quite follow her. They comprehended however, that she appealed to them for protection, that her only hope was in them, that she implored them in the name of God, and in the name of her dead father and mother, not to desert her in this the hour of her extremity. But of course they missed all the pathos of her entreaty, as far as language went; but the mournful, beseeching gaze of the poor dimmed violet eyes, the half-quenched, tremulous voice, and the small clasped hands, stretched out so imploringly, told a tale which scarcely needed words for its unfolding.

"Of course you shall stay here to-night," said Mrs. Bethell, soothingly. She saw that she must not hesitate, even though she would have liked to speak to her husband; for, in the first place, Nora was drenched to the skin, and she was either trembling or shivering, it was difficult to say which, but she shook from head to foot; and she was in that state of almost delirious excitement which is as likely as not to be followed by serious illness. And Mrs. Bethell could act for herself and by herself, if need were, as all sensible women can in an emergency. "Come upstairs at once, my dear," she said, taking Nora's ice-cold hand in hers. "You must get off these wet clothes and those soaked boots immediately, or you will have a terrible cold. Is there a fire in your sitting-room, Gertie?"

"Yes, mamma; I told Anna to keep it up, because Fanny and I meant to make out our club accounts to-night."

And Nora was carefully tended by these two women, and no servant was summoned to assist them, till nurse came to carry away the wet clothes, which she declared might have just come out of the sea, for they could not well be wetter. They chafed her cold hands and feet, they wrung

out the water from her straightened curls, they clothed her in warm flannels, and Gertie brought out for her use her own pretty, new crimson dressing-gown, which she had never yet worn. They made her rest by the fire, and then Mrs. Bethell brought her some food—arrowroot, with wine in it. But she could not eat it, though she tried to do as she was bid; at the first spoonful she turned so sick and faint that they saw it was useless and even cruel to press it upon her, and yet she was evidently sinking into a state of utter exhaustion. The fact was, Nora had not tasted food since her breakfast, and that was swallowed without the smallest appreciation of its flavour, Miss Lane having launched into one of her peculiar exhortations, which were bad for digestion, as well as trying to the temper. By noon Nora had sobbed herself almost into convulsions; her head ached frantically, and soon she became violently sick, as is the case with not a few people after prolonged weeping.

Some people shed tears more or less, and are little, if any, the worse for them, and they leave no trace; but there are others, poor martyrs to irrepressible emotion, whose agony of tears is something terrible. They suffer literal tortures; the physical pain is so acute that for the moment the cause of distress sinks into insignificance; every nerve is on the rack, every pulse throbs, every vein is distended, and the facial bones and muscles are, for the time being, under the power of a demon as pitiless and fierce as acute neuralgia. Then nausea, then severe sickness, with spasmodic retching follows; then prostration; and for several days after the fit has passed, lassitude, depression, want of appetite, and tendency to headache.

One would have thought that Miss Lane, when she saw how ill Nora had become, would have ceased her objurgations, and at least have left her to repose, if she made no attempt at consolation; but the sight of her niece's tears seemed strangely to inflame her anger. Scarlet cloth could not have had a worse effect upon a turkey or a bull. She carried on the battle relentlessly, caring nothing for the girl's pitiful looks and her obvious suffering. She called her distress "temper." She wondered what she had said to cause any tears, "except, indeed, the tears of repentance for sin, which would be better shed in privacy, and

alone before God." Nora wondered how she dared speak of God, who is the Father of the fatherless and the Friend of the oppressed. What could a woman who cruelly tortured everybody about her have to do with God? Thieves, liars, drunkards, profligates could be no worse to God than this woman, who had no consideration—*persistently* no consideration—for the feelings of others; whose self-love banished all other love; to whom gentleness, meekness, and charity were unknown. No criminal expiating his evil deeds by a death of lingering torment could have suffered more than Nora did that day, from breakfast-time till eight o'clock in the evening, when, wild with agony of body and of mind, she had rushed to the vicarage.

Mrs. Bethell took away the arrowroot, and administered a little cold brandy-and-water; "for," said she, "the child cannot take food till the tone of the stomach be somewhat restored." Then, leaving Nora to Gertie and Fanny, she sought her husband in his study, and told him the whole pitiful story, or, at least, all she knew of it.

"Of course we must keep her to-night," said Mrs. Bethell, in conclusion. "If she were flying from justice, instead of *for* justice—which I suspect to be the case—I could not turn her from my door. Besides, I doubt whether she could go home; she looks as if she had been in the clutches of the Holy Inquisition all day—so agonised, so worn, so utterly forlorn! Husband, think of our Gertie or our Fanny made to suffer, and flying unprotected through the dark streets on such a night as this!"

"My dearest Madge, don't be tragic; don't be melodramatic! I do not need such an appeal. Surely, I can trust your judgment; besides, I pity this poor girl with all my heart; I have pitied her ever since the evening I left her at Salamanca House. Only, her coming to us places us in a difficult position; the child has run away from her lawful guardian, and unless she can plead actual ill-usage, I do not see how we can aid and abet her in the proceeding."

"That is so like a man!" cried Mrs. Bethell, impetuously; "you will look at everything through such philosophical spectacles. Ill-usage, indeed! I dare say

the miserable old maid"—— ah! Mrs. Bethell, who is abusive now? you are worse than saucy Laura, whom you reprimanded!—"did not absolutely beat her or starve her, but there must have been 'ill-usage' to bring a poor girl to such a state! Oh! if it had been one of my girls! William! I *must* be kind and motherly to this dear child!"

"Softly, softly, my love! it is precisely what I wish that you should be—kind and motherly to her. Indeed, Madge, darling, you could not help being motherly to any desolate waif and stray that wanted mothering. But I must go at once to Miss Lane."

"Of course you must! forgive me, William, that I spoke in such haste." And she kissed him gently.

"For to-night our course is plain," continued Dr. Bethell; "you and the girls take charge of Nora. To-morrow must take thought for the things of itself. I wonder if she has missed Nora, this cruel aunt, who is so much worse than any stepmother!"

"Oh! as to that," said Mrs. Bethell, with a little scorn, "I have known stepmothers better than real mothers. It is very humiliating to confess it, but it is true nevertheless; some women do not deserve the great joy and honour of maternity. I have often marvelled why God lets them be mothers, but I suppose, of course, He knows best."

"Certainly—*He knows best!* However mysterious events appear, however crooked and contrary things seem to go, let us never forget *that*. God not only knows what is best, but does the best at all times and under all circumstances. Now, my dear, give me my scarf and my weather-proof overcoat."

In about an hour the doctor came back. Nora had eaten a little toasted bread, soaked in her brandy-and-water, and had fallen into a heavy sleep in Fanny's bed. They had not allowed her to talk; indeed, she had required but little repression when they bade her "be quiet," for she was so thoroughly exhausted that it was painful to her to speak.

"Well, my dear?" said Mrs. Bethell, when she went down to meet her husband.

Dr. Bethell laughed. "Nothing could be more ridi-

culous than the scene upon which I suddenly appeared. Nora had not been missed more than a quarter of an hour; no one saw her go out, it seems. Miss Lane supposed she had gone to bed, and would doubtless have retired for the night without suspecting her niece's absence; but Rhoda, knowing how ill her young mistress was, and knowing, too, what a trying day she had gone through, went up to her room to see if she needed any attendance, 'for,' said Rhoda out boldly, before Miss Lane, 'she had cried herself that sick and that faint, that I didn't know what might happen.' So Rhoda, finding the room empty, came down and looked everywhere, where it was possible and impossible for Nora to be, and Ann was questioned, but without result. Then Rhoda went to her mistress, and informed her that Miss Nora was not in the house. Miss Lane at first refused to believe so startling a fact, but being convinced upon demonstration, she became seriously alarmed. I believe the canal, which runs so near the house, you know, came into her mind. And then, Ann suggested that the young lady was in the garden, for it was soon discovered that her walking costume was in its place, and that no umbrella was missing. And when I got there they were all poking about in the mud and the rain, with lanterns, among the defunct Michaelmas daisies. Their consternation, in spite of everything, was most amusing."

"And when you disclosed your errand?"

"Then Miss Lane became fearfully irate, and called Nora 'that wicked girl! that ungrateful girl!' and a few more hard names not worth mentioning. And she immediately demanded restitution of auntly rights. I told her the state Nora was in, and that I could not think of her being disturbed to-night, and then she said it was all the girl's own fault. She had only '*talked* to her!' and she had burst out crying, and persisted in her foolish, causeless tears, till she made herself quite poorly."

"I hope, William, you spoke your mind to her?"

"No, my dear, I did not. Remember I do not know the facts of the case, nor how much Nora herself may be to blame. I cannot wonder at the child absconding in this queer fashion, but it was certainly not a right thing to do. We must be careful, Madge, how we pro-

ceed in this matter; we shall not be Nora's true friends if we encourage her in rebellion."

"Rebellion, indeed! Escape from tyranny is not rebellion."

"Perhaps not, but we must not foster any spirit of opposition in Nora's mind; we must try to make her understand that it is her duty to submit."

"You are right, as you always are, dear, and I was wrong. Only we know so little at present, for I would not let Nora talk, and we had not got her into bed with a hot bottle to her feet many minutes before she fell asleep. To-morrow, I suppose, we shall have to hear both sides—and to-morrow, I suppose, the girl must go back?"

"Certainly we have no right to detain her, or to harbour her under our roof contrary to the will of her natural protector, but we might prevail upon Miss Lane to let her at once begin the visit which you know we were about to propose. She only comes to us a few days sooner."

"Perhaps Miss Lane will not consent."

"Well, after to-night's escapade she may perhaps be more difficult to conciliate. We must do our best. I shall leave it to you, my dear; you know you always could coax the birds out of the bushes, if you tried."

"Was not Miss Lane at all ashamed?"

"I think she was, but she put a good face upon it, and professed to think herself the injured party. Rhoda went out with me to fasten the gate, and she said, 'Miss Nora isn't used to it, you see, sir; she has been brought up tender-like.' 'Not used to what?' I asked. 'To the mistress's tantrums,' was Rhoda's reply. 'I don't think she can help it, sir: she has bad moods, when quarrelling and scolding come as natural as breathing to her. I'm used to them; I don't mind them much, though of course they are aggravating. Tell Miss Nora to cheer up, it is only the missis's way.'"

"A very delightful way, truly. I think I shall advise Nora to try and do something for herself. She has been tolerably educated, and then her native French goes for no little."

"No, my dear, we must not interfere; certainly not at present. We might do more harm than good. And now, Madge, I should like some supper; I think I have fairly earned it."

CHAPTER XV.

NORA'S CONFESSION.

BUT on the morrow only one side could be heard after all, for Nora was far too ill to enter into explanations. A sort of low fever settled upon her, and kept her a prisoner in her room till Christmas-day. And about noon Miss Lane arrived, clearly determined on the capture of the runaway, and looking so grim and resolute that Herbert, who saw her rubbing her feet on the hall-mat, fled upstairs to his nurse in extreme consternation, evidently afraid that the terrible ogress was bent on reprisals. And, indeed, the whole Bethell household shared his trepidation, for both Gertie and Fanny were sadly distressed at the bare notion of their patient being disturbed, as the doctor and Mrs. Bethell scarcely knew what course they ought to follow.

"Come with me, William," said Mrs. Bethell, as Cobb left the library; "I cannot meet that terrible woman alone. Besides, I shall be sure to say something I ought not to say. I shall lose my temper, I know I shall, if you are not there to check me."

"We will encounter the—the—lady together, Madge. Do you suppose I will desert my own wife in extremity?"

"Oh, if you recognise the extremity it is all right, and I am not afraid. Let us go; my courage will be oozing out, like Bob Acres', if we linger."

Miss Lane was in the drawing-room, sitting bolt-upright, her favourite position. She was really as much ashamed as annoyed; but to confess to shame would be to acknowledge herself in the wrong, and that was not even to be thought of. Women of Miss Lane's type are peculiarly fond of heaping, in the aggregate, humiliating epithets upon themselves, but they seldom, if ever, own to any individual fault. They seem rather to glory in calling themselves "miserable sinners," and "wretched dust and

ashes," and of the depravity of their nature they are mournfully boastful. But bring against them any special charge; take them at their own valuation, and they are instantly resentful; their humility vanishes, and pride and self-assertion takes its place.

So now Sarah Lane, though secretly conscious of something very like guilt, was fully resolved to hold her own, to defend her "rights," and not to yield an inch, if so much as the shadow of an accusation were brought against her. She had called herself all sorts of bad names in her prayers that morning, but now she was going to prove herself infallible. To confess her sins in a heap to God was one thing; to own herself in any instance mistaken to man was quite another thing, and not for a moment to be contemplated. She was fully prepared to defend herself, even in the smallest particular.

"Good morning!" said Mrs. Bethell—a little stiffly, it must be owned, but not unkindly.

"Ah! good morning, Miss Lane. Come to look after the truant?" was the doctor's good-humoured greeting.

Sarah looked daggers at her "spiritual pastor and master," for she thought he spoke lightly.

One look at her countenance quenched his hilarity. Mrs. Bethell would have liked to run away, and she felt that if she were Nora she would certainly run away for good and all; and from that moment she felt right motherly towards the unhappy girl, who had no mother of her own, but only this fierce, despotic aunt, to be her mistress and her keeper. And motherhood with Mrs. Bethell meant a great deal; she was that *sacred creature*, a true, devoted mother. The poet, when he wrote—

> "Beneath the foulest mother's curse
> No human soul could thrive;
> A mother is a mother still—
> The holiest thing alive"—

wrote nonsense absolute! But there is not on God's earth aught so sacred, so hallowed, as a mother in whom all the purest, divinest instincts of maternity are revealed. God! mother! fatherland!—blessed is the man who in those three words finds his highest aspirations, his sweetest, best associations.

"I am come for my niece; I wish her to return home immediately," said Sarah, at once, ignoring the Bethells' salutation.

Dr. Bethell replied: "I am afraid Miss Nora is not well enough to rise; indeed, my daughters think her seriously unwell."

"One girl holds with another girl, of course; but Nora was well enough yesterday. She has behaved most abominably, most wickedly, and I am surprised that you and Mrs. Bethell should encourage her. Have a care the contagion do not spread. How would you like one of your own daughters to run away from home?"

"I should not like it at all," returned Dr. Bethell, gravely, and with a certain something in his voice that puzzled while it chafed Miss Lane.

"I am not afraid of any of my girls running away," said Mrs. Bethell, with an amused smile.

"Do not be too secure! Evil communications corrupt good manners! We have Scripture warrant for that; nothing is so contagious as bad example."

"Nothing! Nevertheless, I am not in the least afraid. My girls love their home."

"As all good girls should! But this badly brought up, half-Infidel, half-Papist, French miss of mine is not a good girl. She does not know what is good for herself; she will not be controlled; she defies authority; yes! she defied me, to whom she owes dutiful and child-like submission. She has a perverse, a rebellious spirit, and it must be broken; it is my duty to break it! Let her come home at once, Dr. Bethell; every moment you harbour her under your roof you deliberately aid and abet her sinful course of conduct."

"What has she done, Miss Lane? In what has she transgressed?"

"She has done everything she ought not to have done, and she has not done what she ought to have done," replied Sarah, waxing warm, and quoting, half unconsciously, the general Confession. She was given to quotations, and used them sometimes pretty freely. "She has been ungrateful, insolent, rebellious, perverse—all that is exasperating."

"I am sorry she was insolent; but you know she has

been so unaccustomed to restraint. And, excuse me, Miss Lane, Nora is too much of a Lane to brook stern control. I think she will do everything and anything for love's sake, but you will scarcely coerce her."

"I had to submit to my parents; up to the last day of his life I was in utter subjection to my father, who never said a kind word to me in his life."

Poor Sarah! there was the secret of her own unkindness to others. Here was the father's sin visited upon the children and upon the children's children; only *she* never guessed it. Her interpretation of the latter clause of the second commandment was far otherwise.

"And it is much to your credit that you did so render obedience, Miss Lane," answered Dr. Bethell, "provided the obedience sprang from the right source, and provided that it was not involuntary."

Sarah shrank back a little, for she had a conscience, and a very troublesome conscience sometimes; and she knew full well that her obedience had been only in outward seeming, for she had rebelled in her heart—as who would not under the circumstances?—and she had secretly chafed and fretted, as was only natural under the oppression that fell more and more heavily as she grew older. And she had talked of her father's tyranny pretty freely; it was from Sarah herself that the story of "old Lane's" iron rule chiefly came. And she knew that her forced obedience was not the sort of thing of which to boast.

"I did not come here to argue points," she said, irritably; "I hate arguing. I want my niece, and I suppose you will not think it right to detain her against my will."

"Certainly I shall not," replied Mrs. Bethell, as courteously as she could; "but Miss Lane, since you will not trust my report, you had better see Nora yourself, and then I think you will concur with me in feeling that it is best she should remain where she is for a day or two."

"Why did you not at once dismiss her from your door? Why did you not send her back immediately, and with a stern reproof? If one of your daughters came to me in like fashion, Mrs. Bethell, I would not let her pass my doorway."

"Thank God, one of my daughters will never—no,

never—come to your door in such extremity," replied Mrs. Bethell, impulsively. "No girl, no boy either, ever runs away from a happy home; it is the parents' shame and sin when such things happen. *My girls* run away, indeed!"

"Hush, my dear, no one ever supposed they would or could. But, Miss Lane, are you serious when you say that we ought to have turned that poor half-frenzied child from our threshold? Turned her out, drenched and blown about as she was, to battle anew with the storm of rain and wind! Why, it was all I could do to keep upon my feet, and to face the blast, as I passed from this house to yours. She could not have done it; she would have sunk down exhausted ere she had gone many steps. Madame," —and Dr. Bethell drew himself up, and looked stern rebuke as he spoke,—"if a miserable tramp, if a Magdalen had come to my door last night to implore shelter in God's name, I should not have dared turn her away; far less would I lend a deaf ear to the pitiful appeal of a defenceless, innocent girl—an orphan, an exile from her own country, and also one of my own flock."

"You took the trouble to come to me through all the storm. Nora might have accompanied you. I do not say it was well for her to be in the streets by herself at that hour. But it was all her own fault."

"Would you mind telling us, Miss Lane, what her fault was? What had she done to incur punishment?"

"Punishment! she was never punished! Does she say she was? It is a lie—a great, wicked lie!" Sarah always said "lie;" it was a word she particularly relished. "I never touched her, Dr. Bethell. She had her meals as usual; I never dreamed of locking her up—I wish I had, though! How, then, could she be punished?"

"In the first place, dismiss from your mind the notion that Nora has told us anything, either truth or untruth. She rambled a little last night, my wife tells me, crying about her dead father, and beseeching God to take her away from a life of so much misery."

"The *wicked* girl!"

"And this morning," pursued the doctor, calmly, not heeding the interruption, "she is evidently too much exhausted and too much depressed to talk. I went to see

her myself; she said nothing, and scarcely opened her eyes; indeed, they are so badly swollen that I should imagine she *cannot* open them! But when I spoke to her she began to cry and sob, and Mrs. Bethell hurried me away. I should think myself punished severely were I reduced to such a state."

"I could not help her crying: I hate crying. I only spoke to her for her good, setting before her the error of her ways—quite kindly, too—and she began to cry as if her heart were breaking. She was not downstairs till nearly nine o'clock, till I had all but finished my own breakfast. Surely it was my duty to set before her the sin and the evil consequences of sloth and idleness."

"Surely," assented Dr. Bethell, thinking that if that was all, Nora was unreasonable. But Mrs. Bethell knew better. Only a man knows with what fury of hate a man may meet his brother man: and only a woman knows how cruelly a woman can torture a woman, pricking her to death with the envenomed weapon of the tongue.

"Then," pursued Miss Lane, "Nora's carelessness and untidiness are something dreadful! I wish you could see her room, Mrs. Bethell, or indeed any room in which she has been occupied for any length of time. Then, I wish her to be *domesticated;* I might as well wish her to be Astronomer Royal!"

"Does she refuse obedience when you command—or request?"

"No! she never says in so many words 'I will not do it;' but she does it so ill that it has all to be undone and done over again. I have had a great deal of patience with her, Mrs. Bethell; and when I converse with her seriously—as it is my bounden duty to do—she begins these fits of crying."

"Then, there was nothing special in her conduct yesterday to call forth extraordinary reprimand?"

"Nothing special at the time, certainly; but there has been for long—ever since she came to me, in fact—great carelessness, inattention to rules, want of method, idleness, habits which I particularly dislike, and a persistent shirking of those domestic duties in which I wish her to engage."

s. Bethell was most anxious that her own girls

should be truly domesticated, and a nicer little housewife than Gertie could scarcely be imagined; but then she did not, as Sarah did, confound drudgery with domestication. Sarah had been a drudge all her life; she had a latent and early-developed genius for drudgery; even as a child she had loved to scrub and scour in a small way; and as she grew up, her proclivities in that direction strengthened, partly because old Lane, being a miser, objected to even one efficient servant in his house; partly because she really liked hard and dirty work, though she always vehemently declared she hated it; and very largely because, being naturally of a bustling and stirring character, she could find no other outlet for her activity—nothing else on which to expend her energies.

And now she loved drudgery for its own dear sake; and in spite of her wealth, which might have commanded a whole squadron of servants, she drudged continually, and found her chief happiness therein—which eccentric taste would not have mattered in the least, if she had not worried her servants, because they were not as thorough drudges as herself; and if she had not tormented her luckless niece, because she refused to be a drudge at all, except under compulsion. I believe in her secret heart Sarah would have liked to have no servant at all; nothing would have pleased her so much as being maid-of-all-work herself—ably seconded, of course, by Nora. And if only Nora had taken to scrubbing and scouring, and washing dishes, and sweeping rooms, and had proposed that Rhoda and Ann should be dismissed, and Mrs. Pegg had in for two or three hours in the morning to do the roughest of the work, I verily believe she and Sarah might have gone on very well, with only occasional skirmishes—for Sarah could not have lived if she might not give vent to her temper now and then.

It was pitiable to see the terror and the shrinking that came over Nora's face when her aunt appeared before her. Mrs. Bethell would have prevented the interview, if possible; but Sarah insisting, it could not be avoided. It had, however, one good effect: Miss Lane—who had plenty of sound sense, though temper frequently obscured it—saw at once that Nora was really too ill to be routed up and carried off to Salamanca House, according to inten-

tion; and she perceived, too, that she could not continue to manifest her displeasure without a most undesirable *esclandre*; and Sarah, in spite of her eccentricities and her independent ways, had a righteous horror of Mrs. Grundy. Besides, let us give her her due—Sarah was not all unwomanly; there was a tender spot in her heart, of which, however, she was half ashamed; and it did strike her that she had said some very hard things, and that she had "talked" to Nora about her faults rather too extensively. (In her own estimation Sarah never *scolded*—she always "talked.") And, after all, Nora had had such bad training, so many disadvantages, and no religious teaching, and foreign ways were not as English ways—and good habits could not be learnt in a month. And so, to the surprise of everybody, she suddenly softened; the hard features relaxed; there was evidently a relenting, an inward though unexpressed compunction, and she spoke kindly and even gently to Nora, who seemed soothed, and almost satisfied.

Afterwards Mrs. Bethell and Miss Lane had a long conversation all by themselves. What was said I do not know, but it ended in Miss Lane going home in the best of tempers, promising to send some clothes for Nora, who was to remain a guest at the vicarage for a fortnight.

When Nora was well enough to leave her room, and not before, Mrs. Bethell asked her what had happened on that unfortunate morning which had ushered in so miserable a day. And she found that Nora was perfectly candid and ingenuous, and was quite inclined to take upon herself a due share of blame.

"You see, dear madame," she said, "I have never thought about all the things which *ma tante* makes of such grand account. I did not care to get up early in the morning; old Louison used to bring me a cup of chocolate about eight o'clock, and I got up when I liked; sometimes I was already dressed when Louison came; sometimes I went to sleep again afterwards; but papa and I never had our breakfast before eleven. It is the way in France, as you doubtless know, madame; breakfast is late, and it is like a little dinner, though of course people, busy people, get up hours before the regular breakfast. I know I ought to get into English ways, and I must and will; for my dear papa he used to say, 'I want my little

girl to learn English ways; my girl must grow up into an English woman. But the mornings did seem so dreary, and oh! so cold, and the days were so long, I dreaded to begin them. That morning I was later than ever, though Rhoda called me in good time, and somehow I was longer than usual in dressing; when I got down *ma tante* was greatly in anger, and she scolded me with many hard words. I tried not to mind, but to take my breakfast quietly, and that seeming not to mind her did make her, oh! so much worse! I couldn't help crying at last; and indeed I was not crying for anger, as she said, but for very grief; yet I hoped and hoped, and said to myself, 'It will be over soon; she will not be thus unamiable much longer; for Louison used to be horribly cross, and tell me how bad I was. But her crossness stayed not; when she had said so much—'let herself off,' papa used to say—she was content, and I could soon coax her to come all right again. But *ma tante* I could not coax. If I kept silence, she said, 'I will make you to speak;' if I answered, she said, 'Oh! you insolent!' If I cried, she mocked me, and said, 'Oh! you infant—you ugly one!' And indeed I was ugly; I knew it well. And when she had done scolding me about rising late—and that she had reason, I do confess, madame—she began about something else, about many things; and she went on and on all the day, except when she scolded Rhoda and Ann. Rhoda did not care, and she said to me, 'Never you mind, Miss Nora, it's only her way; hard words break no bones. Her bark is worse than her bite.' But the hard words did break my heart; they went very deep down, and I felt as if the pain of them would never go away again. At last, just when I did feel that it was too much to bear any more, she spoke of my dear papa; and oh! madame, she said such things; they are not true—I know they are not. Papa was *good*—indeed he was!"

"I do not doubt it, my dear. Do not excite yourself;" for the girl's cheeks were all aflame, and there was a strange fire in her large violet eyes.

"But aunt said he was not; that he was a child of the devil; that his soul was lost. I did not quite understand, but I was shocked, and I said, 'Do you mean that my dear, blessed papa is among the damned?' And she said '*Yes*

—she did mean that! Papa lived and died unconverted, and so could not enter heaven.' And then she told me I was like him—I should be a goat and not a sheep at the last day. But I cared not for what she said concerning myself. The good God knows I do want to do what is right, and I am not afraid of Him. But I could not bear to hear such things about my own dear papa; it was too cruel, and madame, I avow it, I lost myself. I know not what I said, but I am sure I said very strong things; for I told her that if such as she went to heaven, I did not want to go there. I know it was wrong, but I was as one frenzied. I think I said a great deal of my wrath in French, and *ma tante* she knows no French; so the worst, perhaps, she did not understand, which was well. I was horribly sick and ill too. I had been sick since the morning. I had had no food all day, and the pains in my head were unbearable—I could not help groaning with the anguish; and at last, when she would not let me alone, but still talked of papa, and the so wicked country of France—which I do so truly love—I grew desperate; and when she said something that was worse than all—I could not tell it even to you—I ran out of the room and into the kitchen. It was empty; the maids were both upstairs. I heard the rain outside beating and splashing, and the wind rushing, and I felt as if I must go away right out into the storm. I was half mad, I fancy. Rhoda's shawl hung on a peg. I seized it, and put it over my head, and ran out just so into the pelting tempest. I only meant to get into the garden, but when I was once out I could not go back again—the wind seemed to drive me on. I thought of you. I knew the way even in the dark, and so I came. And you, madame, and your daughters were to me as God's own angels; and I pray the dear Lord to bless you all for ever and for ever."

And in spite of its inauspicious commencement, Nora's visit was a very pleasant one. She spent a very happy fortnight at the vicarage—a useful as well as a happy fortnight; for Mrs. Bethell's keen maternal instincts taught her to understand girls, even girls of an abnormal type, like Nora, and she gave her wise and gentle counsel, which Nora took in all good faith and perfect meekness. She went back to Salamanca House strengthened and consoled

—a far wiser girl than she left it, and determined, as far as in her lay, to please her aunt, and to be brave, and patient, and industrious, and hopeful. The sweet, calm home-life of the Bethells had done her good, and it had refreshed her, and helped her to understand the idea of domestic English life; though at the same time it gave her a pang to see those girls with their mother, whom they so deeply loved and truly reverenced; and she sighed, and said to herself, "Oh, if only *ma tante* would be like that! If she would but be always reasonable! I would try so hard never to displease her! But, alas! she seems so often in anger for I know not what. Shall we ever be happy together?"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DEPUTATION.

It was Monday evening, and Dr. Bethell was feeling what persons call "Mondayish." He was a little tired, he said, and a little lazy, and he was spending an hour or two quietly in his study, looking over some books and pamphlets just arrived from town. He was not quite in spirits either; various small causes had operated upon his mind to produce a half unconscious depression and a little natural irritation. Things were not going on smoothly at St. Oswald's; there were dissensions in the fold, and the sheep were far from feeding contentedly on the pastures provided for them.

There had been various indications of rebellion in the camp—nothing very decided, but just enough to show that it needed only a very little breeze to fan into a flame the smouldering ashes of disaffection. Whatever Dr. Bethell proposed was sure to be negatived; even the smallest improvements in the service were criticised and carped at;

and those who had received him at the first with open arms, now met him with a punctilious courtesy and a guarded coldness with which it was very difficult to deal.

He was turning over his pamphlets somewhat carelessly, thinking more of some slight incidents of the last few days than of their contents, when the door-bell rang, and Cobb almost immediately afterwards made his appearance in the study. "There are some gentlemen wanting to see you, sir; shall I show them in?"

"Some gentlemen! How many, Cobb?"

"Four, sir! There are the two churchwardens, and Mr. Jennings and Mr. Kimber. They bade me say they had special business with you, sir."

"Ah! I wonder what they want? Show them in, Cobb."

Cobb lingered a moment to stir the fire; as he did so, he said. "There was something about a deputation, sir; I heard of it yesterday after the christenings was over; and as I opened the door a minute ago, I heard Mr. Little ask, 'Shall we *say* a deputation?' And Mr. Lupin made answer, 'No, no! the less formality the better.'" And Dr. Bethell began to perceive what was in store for him, and girded up his loins accordingly.

The gentlemen were announced, and the doctor politely bade them be seated. They stiffly shook hands, and sat down with solemn yet perplexed faces. The fact was, they had not settled who should take the initiative, nor indeed had they come to any conclusion as to the particular form that initiative should take. Thus they had placed themselves at no small disadvantage. Mr. Lupin looked as if he were assisting at the funeral of his best friend. Mr. Jennings grew redder and redder in the face, and he was naturally of a florid complexion. Mr. Kimber, a young man, with a preternaturally old expression of countenance, cleared his throat vigorously, and stared up at the gas. Mr. Little, the meek grocer, who had been elected churchwarden in Mr. Grover's time, and who still retained office, regarded the rector deprecatingly, as if half ashamed of his own position, and not a little frightened at what might ensue. Dr. Bethell waited a few seconds, hoping that some one would break the silence; but no word was ken by any one of the quartette—only Mr. Lupin sighed

audibly, almost groaned in fact, and Mr. Kimber hacked and coughed as if he wanted a spittoon.

"A cold night," said the doctor, wheeling round his chair nearer to the hearth. "Will you not draw up to the fire, gentlemen? Mr. Kimber, do not sit so close to the window; you have a cough already."

"I am quite warm enough, I thank you, Dr. Bethell," replied Mr. Jennings, who was in a perspiration.

"Quite warm enough," echoed Mr. Lupin, still lugubriously.

"Yes, we are quite warm enough," added Mr. Little, in a small, thin voice, that accorded very well with his appearance.

That point being so far settled, Dr. Bethell said, "My servant told me you had some particular business with me to-night. Is it about that new school-fund of which we were speaking last week?"

Mr. Jennings shook his head ominously, and Mr. Kimber murmured, "No, no school fund! Would to God it were —what it is not!"

"What is the matter? Speak out, gentlemen;" and Dr. Bethell looked from face to face with a calm scrutiny that rather discomposed the "deputation."

At last Mr. Lupin took up his parable. "Dr. Bethell, this is a very serious occasion. I am very sorry—we are all very sorry—that such an occasion should be necessary. We've kept silence, while our hearts burned within us, and now we feel that as Christians we must speak with our tongues."

"Pray speak—speak without reserve. What is wrong?"

"It's all wrong, doctor; you don't give us the pure milk of the Word! You are not Evangelical; you know you ain't, now; and with your views you ought never to have come among us," said Mr. Jennings, and his face by this time looked very like the autumn moon rising in a fog.

"With my views? I do not understand. What are my views?"

"That's just what we want to know, doctor. They are not *sound;* we can see that for ourselves; but we should like to know more about them. We are plain folks, and we like plain doctrine. Yours is not an awakening

ministry. Some say you are High Church, and some say you are a *Rationalist*—a sort of infidel! Some say one thing and some another, and we want to know really and truly what you are, doctor. You see, we've always had the Gospel at St. Oswald's. Mr. Bunn, he was a burning and a shining light, and he preached salvation or damnation, and no mistake. Mr. Grover, too, always preached the Gospel, though he didn't live it; but no one could say he wasn't orthodox. I am afraid the same thing cannot be said now, Dr. Bethell. You'll excuse us, but we must be faithful."

"Faithfulness needs no excuse. But if, as I understand, you are accusing me of unfaithfulness in my ministry, will you have the goodness to come to particulars? What doctrine have I preached that is, as you say, unsound—opposed to the teaching of Holy Scripture?"

"It is not so much what you preach as what you don't preach. You don't warn sinners; you don't tell of the wrath of God on the impenitent. You talk about heaven, but you scarcely speak of hell, and of the fire that never shall be quenched. You speak as if God loved all men, saints and sinners alike."

"And does not God love all? Would you have me say, He loves some and hates others?"

"He hates sinners."

"Nay! He hates the sin, but loves the sinner."

"You preach a God out of Christ."

"That I cannot do, for I know of no such God. It is only in Christ that I know God; only in Jesus' face that I see my Father's smiles. God made manifest in the flesh is the only God with whom I can have communion. God out of Christ is a God out of the Bible, out of men's hearts—a God living only in heathen creeds and dreariest superstitions."

"He is not God in Christ to the ungodly?"

"God is God in Christ always, and under all circumstances. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. It is we who change; we who will not accept Christ, and so will not accept God, since only by Christ can man come to the Father."

"That seems straightforward enough," said Mr. Lupin,

slowly. "Those are our sentiments, though we should not put it in that way. I suppose the way of putting things does alter as time goes on."

"And not only the way of putting, but the aspect of things themselves. We see things more clearly as we grow in years and in experience; we all begin, or may begin, where our fathers leave off. Thus we inherit the wisdom of the ages."

"Worldly wisdom is a snare," sighed forth Mr. Kimber.

"Worldly wisdom, which means selfish policy and nothing more, is not wisdom at all. For wisdom cannot be worldly; it is of God, and it comes to us either directly, straight from Him—or indirectly, through His works."

"Not many wise men after the flesh, not many noble," urged Mr. Kimber, again.

"Not many worldly-wise, not many worldly-prudent," replied Dr. Bethell. "For my part, if the Book left out one letter, and said 'not any,' I should not feel disposed to doubt it. For nothing in the world is so dangerous, so antagonistic to truth, as the assumed wisdom which pretends to pronounce its dictum as infallible. When a man thinks, 'Now, I know all truth; now, I can separate the sound from the unsound; now, I have a creed which is incontrovertible, articles of religion of which I approve, liturgies or non-liturgies which are faultless,' he is building up four walls round his mind which must shut out from his view not only his neighbours whom he censures, but God's own sunshine, and all the joy and loveliness of nature. He is like a man living at the bottom of a shaft; he gets a glimpse of the blue sky, and he sees the stars and the moon afar off; but he sees them when he should not see them—when he ought to be looking at the sun. His life is unnatural; his whole being is unnatural and maimed. What shall we say to such a man when he asks us to come down and live with him at the bottom of his well, where he flatters himself the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth resides?"

"We would say the man was a poor fool," replied Mr. Lupin, bluntly enough. "But if he takes the Bible as his standard, he can't be wrong, you know."

"The people that are always saying they make the Bible

their standard—who flourish isolated texts in your face whenever they want to exalt a pet doctrine or virtue, or whenever, on the other hand, they wish to denounce any practice to which they are disinclined, are the most provoking, ay, and the most dangerous people with whom to deal, for they dishonour God and tempt men to unbelief."

"But the Bible is the religion of Protestants, doctor."

"It is the glory of Christianity, the jewel of the world; it is a mine of treasure; but it is not, as many men try to make it, a cabalistic talisman—a mere Abracadabra! God made the world, and, lo! it was very good; but men spoilt it. God gave the Bible as His revelation to mankind; that, too, is very good, and that, too, men do their utmost to mar and to destroy."

"The Papists do," said Mr. Kimber; "*they* add notes, to explain, as they say, but really to twist to their own purposes the texts which are confusion to their creed. Now, Protestants don't do that; they give you an unadulterated Bible."

"I wish they did; but it is just what they don't do! Tractarians and Evangelicals alike come to us, Bible in hand, and cry, 'Here are our credentials!' Men treat the Bible shamefully, and some of its worst foes are they who make an idol of it. They bring the Bible to their own dogmas, instead of the reverse practice; they interpret this and comment on that, till Holy Scripture loses its integrity, and loses, too, all its breadth, and strength, and power, being brought within the circumference of the narrowest of minds. And if ever men are allowed to be deluded and to believe a lie, it is those men who wilfully blind themselves, and strive to make others blind also."

"We can't give up the Bible," said Mr. Little, doggedly; "for all you say, I am not going to give up my Bible."

"God forbid that you should," replied Dr. Bethell, solemnly; "at least till you get something better, which I do not think you ever will in this life. When you see Christ 'face to face'—when, perchance, you may sit at His feet and listen to His words, even as now you listen to mine, then you may do without the Bible. I cannot tell;

for of the developments of that life beyond the grave we know nothing, only 'we shall see Him as He is.'"

"That's all true," said Mr. Lupin again; "that's true as Gospel. I told Mr. Jennings and his good lady, and my old woman, and the rest of them, that I was quite sure you were sound at heart; that it was only the way you wrapped things up, like; that you meant just the same as Parson Bunn meant. Says I—One man says, 'There's a cow!' another says, 'There's a quadruped!' another —most likely he's a butcher—he says, 'There's a beast!' and a poet says, 'Lo! the mother of the milky herd!' Now, they all say quite different things, but mean the same; and that's the way with parsons, Church parsons at least. I don't pretend to know nought about Dissenters. And so I think we may be satisfied, friends; Dr. Bethell meant just the same as Parson Bunn meant, only——"

"But I do not mean what Mr. Bunn meant," interrupted Dr. Bethell. "Unless he be greatly belied, I differ from him on most important points. Let that be distinctly understood. What Mr. Bunn taught I cannot teach, for I do not believe it; I hold it to be error, very sad and mischievous error, striking at the root of true Christianity."

"Error, sir!" cried Mr. Kimber, who had heard the Rev. Leo's last sermon when he was about seven years old. (Mr. Little had never heard him at all; but being of the old school, he felt bound to defend him.) "Error, sir! why, Parson Bunn *preached the Gospel*, the *pure* Gospel, sir!—yea, and all the Gospel! *He* preached a God out of Christ to sinners; an angry, wrathful, unreconciled God to the unconverted."

"But where did he find this God?"

"In the Bible, of course."

"But I am quite sure he did not; for the Bible of to-day is the Bible of fifty years ago—not even revised, as I suppose it will be before long. And in it I find no word about God out of Christ. Of course, I mean in the New Testament; I don't profess to find Christ all through the Old Testament, as some theologians do. But we are Christians, and not Jews; and I imagine it is New Testament teaching to which you refer."

"Certainly," said Mr. Kimber.

"Then will you bring me one text which speaks of God as separated from Christ?"

"Really, at this moment—yes, I remember one; 'God out of Christ is a consuming fire.'" Parson Bunn had taught his flock that lesson well; they all believed in it. And both Kimber and Little looked triumphant. What they wanted God out of Christ for, it is difficult to determine; not for their own personal confusion and destruction, we may suppose. But from the first, men, to use the old Bible language, have gone a-whoring after false gods, and they naturally find satisfaction in the justification of their choice.

"I really do not know where that text is," said Dr. Bethell. He knew where it was supposed to be, for he had heard it quoted so many times since his first coming to Bradfield. With a smile that might have warned the confident Kimber, he handed him a large Reference Bible, reaching down another Bible for the use of Mr. Little.

"What's the use of looking?" grunted Mr. Jennings; "there isn't no such text."

"Why, I have heard Parson Bunn preach from it times unnumbered," put in Mr. Lupin, quite hotly.

"I hope not," replied the doctor; "that would prove him to be something worse than mistaken."

"It's in *Hebrews*," said Kimber, quite as confident as Sarah Lane had been. How true it is, that if you tell—or, better still, print—a lie often enough, it comes to be received by the unreasoning multitude as an undoubted truth.

"Here it is!" cried Mr. Little—"here it is, Mr. Lupin! he who runs may read—'Our God is a consuming fire': Heb. xii. 29. There, Dr. Bethell, you can't get it out of the Bible any way, and, with it before your eyes, you can't pretend to say it is not there."

"But that is not the text you quoted, gentlemen; you said, 'God *out of Christ* is,' &c. I see nothing like the interpretation you permit. Neither, if I turn to the references in the margin, do I find anything approaching to the imaginary clause. Mr. Bunn may have used the phrase a thousand times—and so, doubtless, have other

theologians of his stamp; but that does not make God's Word; neither in the letter nor in the spirit can I discover aught approaching it. It is Bunn, if you like, but not *Bible;* and I protest against Bunn and Bible being quoted as one and the same authority."

Messrs. Kimber and Little looked very foolish; Mr. Lupin could scarcely believe his own senses. "I could have taken my oath, if necessary, now," he said, presently, "that I had heard Mr. Bunn preach from that very text more than once: it shows how we may run into stupid mistakes. But, doctor, may it not be *understood*—the clause 'Out of Christ,' I mean?"

"By no means. Neither our own sense nor any correlative passage admits of such a rendering. Besides, if we garble one passage to suit our own conviction, we must allow others to be garbled to suit opposite convictions, which we deem heresy. Loose rendering of the Bible is a sad evil—nay, it is a sin. We may not take away from the words of the Book; we may not add unto them. Therefore, we may not insert explanatory clauses unless the context plainly warrant them. In this case, as you may see for yourself, it is far otherwise."

"But it does say God is *a consuming* fire, doctor?"

"Doubtless it does; but it seems to me not a threat, but a note of holy triumph. See! it is '*our* God'—the God whom we love and trust, and fear with a 'godly fear' —which is not to be confounded with dread."

"But fire burns—destroys!"

"And fire also *cleanses!* It burns away the dross, it consumes the base alloy; but the pure metal it refines and tempers. God is a consuming fire to burn up the wood and hay and stubble, to consume the rubbish, to purge the soul of its sin. 'He shall sit as a refiner of silver.' In such a sense is our God, our fathers' God, a consuming fire—a fire which purifies, but does not destroy; but this God, our Father and our Friend, is God in Christ, the Holy One and the Just."

"I never saw it in that light," said Mr. Lupin, thoughtfully; "and to think I, and scores of others like me, have misquoted the Bible for years. But standing as it does, are you sure it means that God is a fire to consume sin, and not the sinner?"

"I am quite sure, because that would not be God as revealed in the Bible, God as made manifest in Christ. If you want a God with thunderbolts—a God really and truly out of Christ—a God whose pleasure it is to bring to destruction the creatures whom He has made,—why, there is Jupiter, who will serve your turn. Why not revive the ancient worship of the chief demon of Olympus, and be at least consistent? And talking of misquoting, it is more frequently done than any of us imagine. A few minutes ago, Mr. Kimber said, 'he who runs may read.' That is a very common and, on the whole, a harmless perversion, only it never can be safe to wrest from its true and simple meaning the smallest sentence in the Bible."

"Come, now," said Mr. Lupin, half amused, "you don't mean to say that it's not written in the Bible that 'he who runs may read'?"

"But I do say it, and can prove it. Look for yourself, Mr. Lupin."

"Let me see it! where is it? In Isaiah, isn't it? No, in Ezekiel."

"It's in Kings or Samuel," said Mr. Kimber, with great decision. "Or, stop now, I'm not sure it is not in Deuteronomy."

"Perhaps, after all, it's only a saying, like 'God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb,' which a good old lady once stuck me out was in Proverbs," admitted Mr. Jennings.

"As it is commonly rendered, it *is* only a saying, for nothing like it is intended in the text to which you refer, and which is in the second chapter of Habakkuk. Let me read the whole passage. The prophet says—'I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved'—or, as the margin reads, 'when I am argued with.' 'And the Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that—*he may run that readeth it!*' Mark! not that he may read who runs, but that he who reads may straightway run and tell it to his fellows. That is clearly the meaning of the text; the passer-by is to read first, and then to run; not to read as he runs. As I said, it is a very common mistake, and not likely, as far as I can see, to do any mischief

—only that as it is *not* in the Bible, we have no right to put it there."

"I don't like all this haggling and carping over the Bible," said Mr. Kimber, sourly; "I've said that 'he who runs may read' all my life, and I'll always say it. I do hate these new-fangled ways! Parson Bunn never troubled his people with none of them. You'll tell me next that 'Suffer the little children' is not in the Bible, nor 'The just shall live by faith,' nor——"

"Hush, my friend; I shall do nothing of the kind. God forbid that I should try to blot out one word that I *know* to be contained in the Book," answered Dr. Bethell, kindly; "I shall never tell you that '*God is love*' is not in the Bible. On the contrary, I shall tell you that it is, over and over again. I shall tell you that 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself;'—not being reconciled to the world, mind! I shall tell you that it is written, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself;' that Christ the Master said, 'If you love Me, keep My commandments;' also that He said, 'And this is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.' But I shall never tell you of a God out of Christ; I shall never tell you that believers are 'a chosen few.'"

"But," interrupted Mr. Little, "our Lord Himself said, 'Fear not, *little flock*.' That's not wrongly quoted, I know."

"The Master did say 'little flock;' for a little flock it truly was when He said it—a few disciples, a mere handful of faithful followers! But we cannot suppose He meant that the flock should remain little, else would He never have said, 'Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.' A little flock once—a great multitude whom no man can number now. Shall not Christ's kingdom exceed Satan's kingdom? If the majority of men be lost, then the gates of hell do prevail, the Evil One wins the day, and Christ is vanquished. No, no; the kingdoms of this world shall become, and are becoming, the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. The world has set up other kingdoms, and they have passed, or are passing, away. The churches have set up other kingdoms by trying to limit God, and they have failed; while all the

time the kingdom of God our Father has progressed, and will progress till it prevails over all other powers and dominions, and the song of the Conqueror resounds from shore to shore. And now, gentlemen, are you satisfied? I cannot teach you what your old pastor taught, because I cannot accept as truths much that he held to be such. But I will preach the Gospel. Have I not preached the Gospel, the true Evangel?"

"Not in the old-fashioned way," persisted Mr. Little; "and we are old-fashioned people, and changes irk us. Give us the good old doctrines in the good old words; that's what we want."

"I cannot give you what I do not find in this Book; and mind you, I take the Book as a whole—I do not choose this part or that part to justify my own assertions. Mr. Little, I am sorry if you and your friends are offended at my preaching, but I cannot help it. That which I believe to be God's message I must deliver; I cannot, dare not, tamper with it. If you cannot receive it, the remedy is in your own hands. I shall be very sorry to part with you; but there are other churches of the Establishment besides St. Oswald's. You may find a man after your own heart."

"I shall not leave you, doctor," said Mr. Lupin, grasping his pastor's hand. "I am glad I came here to-night. I understand you better now; I begin to see that I have been shutting my eyes, and taking the part for the whole. Please God, I'll learn better in my old age. And I'll stand by you, doctor—for I warn you, you will want your friends about you. They can't drive you out, like they are driving out young Stanley from Carvary, but they think they can *nuisance* you out—persecute you, you know, with pins and needles and bodkins. The sword and the rack and the flames have gone out of date—a good thing for you, doctor."

"A good thing for very many of us. The narrower men are, the more they love persecution. Well, the martyrs of one age are the heroes of the next—that is one comfort. As of old, we build the sepulchres of the prophets whom our fathers have killed. For men, even professedly Christian men, do kill one another in these days, though not by actual violence. A wounded spirit is sometimes too

much for a weak body. 'Woe unto the world because of offences, for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh.' Oh! that we all might be tender and loving towards one another."

"Well, doctor, I'll uphold you," said Mr. Jennings, at length; "though my wife don't think she has been exactly considered as she ought to have been. When a woman has once played first fiddle, you see, she don't like just coming in with the chorus. Women are weak things—'weaker vessels,' as the apostle calls them, and we ought to put up with them. Poor things, they ain't got much of pleasure, especially the religious ones; they don't go in for parties and gaieties, so they ought to have it out in what they are used to. Still, though my wife is vexed, and I can't blame her; though she is a little spiteful—women *are* spiteful, you know, doctor, it's their very nature—still, I'll stick to you and stand by you, for I do think you are in the right, and I don't know that those rousing sermons that we set such store by did any more good than a thunderstorm; nor so much, for tempests do clear the air, and I've known them as listened to Parson Bunn's grandest sermons, go home and give way to their tempers till they made a little hell instead of a little heaven about them. I *could* tell you some tales, doctor."

"Please not. I do not like even to hear about bad tempers, I have such a horror of them. If I had a bad-tempered wife—that is, a wife with a temper that could not be depended on—I am afraid I should——well, I won't say what I should do, and happily I am not likely to be tried. But thank you, Mr. Jennings, and thank you too, Mr. Lupin, for your kind assurance. It is well to know who are your friends, especially when there are storm-clouds on the horizon."

"And I will *not* stand by you," said Mr. Little, fiercely; "I will have none of your teaching, none of your rational expoundings, and infidel renderings, and upsettings of what my parents taught me to confide in as sacred and infallible. I'll have none of your houses built on the sand, and daubed with untempered mortar. I won't listen to your 'Peace, peace!' when there is no peace! I'll never hear you preach another sermon; I'll turn any of my family out of doors that goes to hear you, and I and mine will shake

the dust of St. Oswald's from off our feet. There now! I'll be faithful, though my elders ain't." And the grocer took up his hat and seemed quite disposed to shake the dust off his feet there and then, on Dr. Bethell's new Turkey-carpet.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Little; still, if it must be so, it must be so. I think you will feel differently some day. And you, Mr. Kimber?"

"I go with Mr. Little, sir. I endorse every word he says. You'll repent when you see St. Oswald's that empty, that your voice echoes from floor to ceiling."

"I shall not repent, Mr. Kimber, though only the almshouse people remain. I shall be deeply pained, I confess, and bitterly disappointed; but I shall not falter, I hope. God giving me strength, I am sure I shall not. But I must tell you, I do not anticipate any such dismal catastrophe. I should have liked to retain the old congregation; but since they determine otherwise, all I have to do is to bid them a kindly adieu, and wish them God speed wherever they may be. And that others will take their places I am satisfied. You have only to proclaim me to be a heretic, and—such is the perversity of human nature—all Bradfield will throng to hear me."

"I shall not be there to see," replied the impracticable Little.

"Nor I either," echoed Kimber, still more grumpily. "But remember, Dr. Bethell, you'll have to give account of your false doctrines. There'll come a dav when you will be put to open shame before men and angels. You are heaping up wrath to yourself against the day of wrath; you are sowing the wind, and you will reap the whirlwind. As a man soweth even so shall he reap. Good night, Dr. Bethell; may the Lord change your heart!"

Little followed Kimber; the others took leave courteously. But when Dr. Bethell was left alone, his calmness almost deserted him. The note of defiance had been sounded; the fight had begun; when would it end, and how? He felt very sad and weary; his head ached, and his heart ached also. He had come to Bradfield to work among the workers, and to do great things, and already his own people had risen up against him, and none of his brethren except Dr. Burrowes took him by the hand. The

bitter sense of isolation which has borne down for a time many a strong, brave heart, was upon him, and he felt it as a nature fervid and intense as his could not but feel it —*keenly!*

And when he went into the drawing-room, the first words he heard were: "Oh, papa, Maggie Aston has been here, charging us—you and us—with Romanising proclivities, and she says we are all going over to Rome as fast as we can go, and we are almost half-way there."

"What is the matter, Fanny?"

"It's chanting the Psalms, papa! It was of no use telling her that psalms were never meant to be read, and never were read in churches, till within the last two or three hundred years. But that is not all; the *Amens* at the end of the hymn-tunes seem to be the worst; that has given us 'the mark of the beast,' she says—speaking in the name of the congregation, of course. I suppose she came as a sort of deputation. And about the Bible-class——"

"Stop, my dear; I cannot bear any more to-night."

Then up rose Madge Bethell. She had been watching her husband's face ever since he entered the room; she knew from Cobb who the four gentlemen were, and she guessed at once, with all a woman's quickness, why they came. She saw at a glance that he had had already quite as much as he could bear; so she said quietly, putting her arm round her husband's neck—and she had to stand upon a footstool to do it, she was such a little Dame Dumpling of a woman!—"Hush, Fanny dear! Papa is tired; he must not be troubled about schools, or choirs, or anything else to-night. Suppose you girls give us 'Abide with me' before you go to bed. And, William dear, lie down a little and rest. You have been talking too much for Monday. I will get you some beef-tea."

He would have detained her, holding her soft, firm little hand in his. His wife's unuttered sympathy was an inexpressible consolation, and made him feel stronger and more hopeful than five minutes before he could have imagined possible. But physical exhaustion had done its work both in looks and voice, and Madge was not to be diverted from her purpose.

"You shall tell me all about it, dearest, presently—

every word," she whispered, as she slipped away in quest of the beef-tea. She might have rang the bell! you say. So she might. But she was not above going into her kitchen, even though she had a very good cook there. But good cooks are not always good hands at beef-tea, especially husbands' beef-tea. Besides, no really good wife ever leaves her husband's beef-tea even to the best of cooks—and Madge Bethell was emphatically a "good wife."

CHAPTER XVII.

THROWING DOWN THE GAUNTLET.

THE winter passed away, and it was spring time once more. Such a spring the Bethells had never known; no clear sunshine, no budding leaves, no tassel-like catkins, no early flowers, except such as came from the nurseryman, and even those refused to flourish beyond an appointed time. "Oh! for the squares and parks of London," sighed Gertrude, as she turned from a dwarfed, sooty primrose in the rectory garden. "There is not a tree in all Bradfield, I do believe; you must get fairly out of the town before you find green leaves."

"And I think sentimentally of Fleet Street and the Strand," said Dr. Bethell. "I really think I must run up to London, just to smell violets and hyacinths again."

"Dear me," said Maggie Aston, who had come in for the new list of Sunday-school lessons, "I should have thought London was the last place in the world to go to for flowers!—*smoky* London! you know, is proverbial."

"It may be smoky compared with the real open country," replied Gertrude, "but it is nothing to Bradfield; I never go out here without getting 'a black' on

my face, and last week, as I went up Broad Road to Arleston, I got a fine smudge all down my cheek. One youth shouted 'Coal black rose!' after me, another informed me that I had made a mistake in my paint, and a third muttered a remark which I could not quite understand, only I perceived that it was uncomplimentary. But as to flowers, London is full of them at this season of the year."

"Oh, yes; if you go to Covent Garden for them."

"The flower-girls will save you that trouble. You will not go a street's length in London without seeing one or more basketsful of flowers. Violets and primroses especially are abundant everywhere. Oh, dear! this Bradfield; I dare say it may be a very important place, but it is excessively uninteresting."

"I wonder you do not go back to London, if it is such a paradise of delights!"

"How can I? Papa and mamma live here now, and my home is with them."

"What made your papa come here?"

"I hardly know. He said he had not enough to do. We had a small church, and, of course, a small congregation; everybody was rich and respectable, and there were no poor. The living of St. Oswald's was offered him, and he accepted it. Dr. Burrowes was very anxious that he should come to Bradfield."

"Dr. Burrowes is anything but *sound*, you know," said Miss Aston. "He is, in fact, half a Unitarian, and every now and then he gets into hot water. I dare say he was glad to find somebody to divide his dilemmas with him. Do you know the Tompkins and the Cartwrights have left?"

"Left the town?"

"No, of course not. They have left St. Oswald's, and a great many more people are leaving: the fact is, Dr. Bethell is not at all acceptable. He does not take, you see: people says he does not preach the Gospel; and, indeed, he does say very strange things, and do strange things as well. I am sure I was literally *stunned* when I met him last week; I could not believe my eyes. I asked myself if I were awake; and I should not have credited the evidence of my own senses, had not Lucy Alcott seen it as well as myself!"

"Seen what?" asked Gertrude, nervously, almost losing patience. "What did you see?"

"I saw Dr. Bethell, the rector of St. Oswald's, my pastor—at present—arm-in-arm with that obnoxious young minister at Carvary!"

"With Mr. Stanley! Is that all?"

"*All!* Do you think it is in the fitness of things that a clergyman of the Church of England should publicly associate with a Dissenter, and such a Dissenter, too! Why, the people of Carvary will not have him at any price! He has been requested to resign."

"I know; and he will resign. He is a thousand times too good for the people he has to do with. Papa is very fond of him."

"It would better become Dr. Bethell to cultivate intimacy with the clergymen of his own Church."

"And I think," returned Gertrude, with spirit, "it would better become us not to sit in judgment on our elders. If you think it right to censure your pastor, I think it wrong to criticise my father; so, if you please, we will turn to another subject."

Maggie rose, pale with anger. To be called to account by a chit like that, a mere child, not twelve months out of the schoolroom, it was insufferable. Miss Aston ruled her mother, and kept in awe nearly all her friends. She was not accustomed to, and never tolerated the voice of disapproval. She was queen of St. Oswald's, and had been for the last fourteen years; and while she remained at St. Oswald's she would never yield an inch of her prerogatives. She was not going to "knock under" to Gertrude Bethell; and the presumptuous girl should be made to remember her temerity. "In that case I will wish you good morning," she said, with her superlative sneer. "I do not choose to have the theme of discourse dictated to me, and by a person younger than myself."

"Then you should not talk scandal of a man in his own house, and to his own daughter. I am sorry to offend you, Miss Aston; but I cannot discuss my father, nor permit him to be discussed, in my presence."

The two girls stood and looked at each other, and exchanged a silent cartel of defiance. And then Maggie, supremely disdainful, turned away, her long graceful robes

sweeping after her as she went, for Maggie was never other than gracefully attired, she had unimpeachable taste in dress. As she left the room, she flung down a pale lavender glove—"six and a quarter"—*Jouvin's* very best. "You know what that means!" she said, as she gave a parting glance. Gertrude stood bewildered; Maggie spoke as if in banter, and yet there was something terribly earnest in her tone. Was it fun, or did she really mean it? Another minute and she was gone, and Gertie picked up the glove.

She went in search of her mother, but Mrs. Bethell had gone out. Fanny, however, was in their room, and to her she told the whole strange story, finishing up with—"Do you know, Fanny, I almost think she came on purpose to quarrel with me? I fancied she meant mischief the moment she began to speak. I wish you had been there."

"I am glad I was not; I should have said something strong, something that I should have been sorry for afterwards, and I might have compromised papa. By the bye, where was he? I know he went to speak to Miss Aston."

"He did not stay, he merely gave her the papers, which she might just as well have got from Miss Mottram, the superintendent. She said nothing of any consequence while papa was in the room; she only laughed at the idea of flowers being more plentiful in London than at Bradfield. The moment he was gone, she began to find fault with him. Really, Fanny, if she had been sixty and papa a raw youth of sixteen, she could not have assumed more. I am sorry I lost my temper, but I could not let her go on talking about papa in that way, and I know what she did say was only the prelude to something worse, which she did not say."

"Thanks to you! I am glad you stopped her. If she saw papa walking with the Jewish Rabbi, what is that to her—and what harm?"

"What, indeed! But she is naturally exasperating—a really disagreeable girl."

"I wish we were back again in dear old London."

"So do I, but it is vain to wish; papa will not succumb. And let these people rage as they may, and persecute as they will, they cannot turn him out as they are

turning out Ernest Stanley, at Carvary. The Dissenters may be as good as we are; I know they are, indeed, but their polity places them at sad disadvantage."

"I would not be a Dissenting minister's wife for worlds," said Fanny, thoughtfully.

"Would you not? No, of course you would not, you would have to turn Dissenter yourself."

"It is not that so much, though I should miss the Church service dreadfully. I never, never could give up the Liturgy. But I should dread the discontent of the people. Oh! it would be horrible to have one's husband persecuted, and slandered, and tortured, as this young Stanley is! That is the great fault of Dissent, the ministers are too much in the power of the people."

"And under our system the people are too much subjected to the minister. They cannot choose him; they may have a man imposed upon them whose teaching they abominate, and they cannot help themselves. In large towns it does not matter; if one church does not suit, there is another within walking distance, and you can practically choose your own pastor. But in country places it is far otherwise,—the people must take the spiritual food thrust upon them, or starve."

"Or go into strange pastures, and feed there like our friends the Hesketh."

"Yes. Papa does not blame the Hesketh in the least, though they never go near their parish church; they might as well go to mass at once, and better; for one can respect people who really are what they profess to be, though they may have fallen into error."

"They used to drive to Handley Cross once a month, did they not? Just for Communion?"

"Yes, they did, till they thought it hest to give it up. It was a long drive through a cross country, bad roads and all that, and Mr. Hesketh did not like working his servants or his horses on Sunday. They had a pew at the Congregational Church, and they were very much identified with the work there. Charlotte and Adelaide taught in the schools, and Dora had a tract-district. Also they profited by the teaching of Mr. Elmore, the Dissenting minister; so they determined to commune in future with those fellow-Christians with whom they regularly worshipped."

"But taking the Communion is joining the Church, is it not? The Hesketh are in reality Dissenters, then?"

"No, they are not. They are in communion with them, and why should they not be? Adelaide told me all about it last summer. She said they had the choice of three things—going to the Anglican mass, and eating a nasty pasty wafer, instead of the simple bread and wine of Protestant churches; or driving seven miles each way to hear a service mumbled through in a dreary, damp, old church, tumbling to pieces, by a man who concerned himself about port wine and foxes a great deal more than about the Christian faith; or, joining their friends in a simple rite, in the sanctuary where they ordinarily worshipped, and where they knew that the Master Himself would be present at the breaking of bread. I could not blame them."

"Of course not; but I thought Dissenters would not let you take the sacrament unless you were what they call 'a member of the church'?"

"It used to be so, but things have widened of late years. Congregational or Independent churches invite to their sacramental board—which is really not theirs, but their Master's, you know—all who love Christ and wish to honour Him. All who desire to come are welcome. Mr. Hesketh told Mr. Elmore, when he spoke to him on the subject, that he did not wish to sever himself from the Church of England, in which he had been baptized and confirmed and married, and to whose services he owed so much; but as his parish church was no longer open to him, or to any of his family—they being of one mind in this matter—he should be thankful to remain for Communion, as well as for the regular service. And Mr. Elmore replied that he was most welcome—the church already knew him and his for Christian people, and that was quite sufficient; he could join them for as long or as short a time as he chose; no ceremony of introduction was required; as true members of the great Catholic Church of Christendom they might come and go as conscience or convenience bade them. Being one with Christ, they were one with the Universal Church, irrespective of creed, or form, or ecclesiastical polity."

"I like that! I scarcely thought Dissenters were so unsectarian."

"Papa says that as a community they have thrown off the bondage of sectarianism far more completely than we have. But then we are so hampered; we belong to the State, and we cannot do as we like; it is not our own fault. If we were free, we might emulate the Nonconformists."

"Gertie, if you were not a clergyman's daughter, I believe you would not mind being a Nonconformist."

"I should like a free Church of England, Fanny. I would be a political Nonconformist to-morrow if papa and mamma would not mind; but I could not give up the Prayer-book, though I should like some things struck out of it. Oh, Fanny! did you hear what Mrs. Lebrun was telling mamma the other day? Her husband was sent for to visit a dying person on Ash Wednesday. The messenger found their foot-boy Roger in the garden, and at once told him his errand, and Roger replied, 'Master can't come now; he's in church a cussing of the people! When he's done the cussing he'll come out, and I'll tell him.'"

"We certainly should be none the worse for the loss of the Commination Service; and as for the Athanasian Creed, I do believe papa dreads Easter Sunday, because he will be obliged to read it."

"Only don't say so. Fancy, if Maggie Aston heard you vituperating against the Athanasian Creed, and in papa's name, too!"

"Do not be afraid; I will bridle my tongue. I will not compromise papa."

There was a loud thumping at the door, as of a small battering-ram in full action. Enter Miss Laura, book in hand, and in no amiable frame of mind.

"I say, Gertie, it's a shame; I've been waiting hours to read my French. I shall tell mamma you neglect your duties, and I must have a proper governess." And Gertrude, feeling vexed and guilty, did not attempt to excuse herself. The truth being, that she had forgotten all about poor little Laura, waiting for her in the lonely schoolroom.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DEACONS OF CARVARY.

ERNEST STANLEY was about eight-and-twenty years of age, and he had been more or less associated with the late Mr. Grey for full five years. He had been assistant minister, not co-pastor; and since Mr. Grey's death, he had been something so anomalous, that he shrank from a continuance of the position. Whether Stanley, being now on his own responsibility, spoke more freely than heretofore, or whether the people, loosed from the control which Mr. Grey, in virtue of his years, his mature wisdom, and his fervent piety—which made him an authority in all the churches of his order—had so long exercised over them, became captious, and disposed after years of loving submission to assert themselves, it is very difficult to decide. I am only sure on one point; Carvary was in revolt! Mr. Stanley preached Pelagianism, and Arianism, and Socinianism, and Puseyism, and Rationalism, and a dozen other *isms*, that I cannot now remember. According to the ancient deacons and the elderly ladies of Carvary he preached every heresy under the sun, and even invented, for their especial benefit, one or two that had never been heard of before. His prayers had little in them, and he selected Arminian sounding hymns; he read the Bible dramatically; he was arrogant, conceited, heady, spoke evil of dignities, and cared little or nothing about precedents! The deacons and elders held *sub rosa* meetings; but being all married men, they told their wives what passed at these mysterious gatherings, and the wives, with very few exceptions, told their intimate friends, in strictest confidence, and the friends told other friends, who chattered freely in divers circles, both in and out of Carvary; so that sundry and wonderful reports were circulated in the town, and Mr. Stanley's theological sins and shortcomings were discussed everywhere.

Looking back, and weighing carefully both sides of the question, I am disposed to think that Ernest Stanley's dominant fault was one which he could not help, and which would certainly correct itself daily—the fault of youth! His congregation expected too much from him; they required from him the originality and vigour of five-and-twenty, and the grave, steady, ripe thought and action of three-score years and ten. They wanted Conservatism and Liberalism, scholarship and personal piety, eloquence and simplicity, splendid sermons—three a week—and continual visitation! Naturally, they did not get what they wanted; and, quite as naturally, considering the narrowness of their souls, and their immense self-appreciation, they were disgusted and irate, and by no means anxious to conceal their sentiments. The Bradfield Dissenters were no whit more courteous than the Bradfield Episcopalians; they were suave enough if you agreed with them; but they could not bear "differences of opinion," and when they were annoyed they demonstrated their annoyance pretty plainly.

The first thing was the breaking up of the ladies' Bible-classes; they dwindled rapidly, till there came a day, not three months after the death of John Grey, when only one small damsel, the youngest and dullest of the flock, made her appearance. The Sunday-school teachers quietly ignored any authority which, as their minister, Mr. Stanley might be supposed to hold. They, as well as the deacons, held meetings—"packed meetings," some folks said—and passed votes of censure "on the teaching and preaching of the Rev. Ernest Stanley, B.A., temporary pastor of the Congregational Church, worshipping in Carvary Street, Bradfield."

And the superintendents—two grave, reverend greybeards, and two solemn-faced spinsters, "of eminent piety"—and the teachers, both young men and maidens, save one, who was seriously admonished for her unfaithfulness, and forthwith sent to Coventry by her fellow-workers—and the elder scholars, male and female, and the master and mistress of the day-school, with their assistants, and all the pupil-teachers, recorded their votes of censure as passed upon the unlucky heretical young man who filled their pulpit.

It was some time before Stanley, who was one of the frankest natures it is possible to conceive, began to understand what was the matter. He found that he was treated with shyness and coldness by some of the brethren and sisters of Carvary, and with stern *hauteur* by others. The congregation thinned certainly, but then it was cold, snowy weather, and half the town was down with influenza. The organist and choir objected persistently to every tune he wished for; but then John Grey had no ear for music, and had never interfered; and perhaps the ladies and gentlemen in the singing-gallery thought the pastor had no business to suggest, much less to require, any changes in the Psalmody.

But when it came to the deacons bowing, without speaking; to whole blocks of empty pews on Sunday evenings, to pointed personal disrespect, to the extinction of the Bible-classes, and to meetings being called and held without any reference to himself, it became evident that some kind of catastrophe was impending.

One dreary afternoon in March, the ladies of Carvary held their monthly missionary working meeting. The deacons also had a *sub rosa* gathering of their own; and certain leading members of the church held secret conclave in a remote corner of the building, preparatory to the "church meeting" in the evening. Mr. Stanley had not been summoned to any of these meetings; but he happened to be at Carvary that afternoon, on business of his own, which being speedily terminated, he found his deacons assembled in deepest and gravest deliberation. There was dead silence when he opened the door and stood in their midst—the tall, stalwart, handsome young man, whom they had almost professed to love, and certainly to esteem in their late pastor's time.

Stanley did not apologise for the intrusion; he thought he had a right to be in his own deacons' vestry. Unless they were preparing to surprise him with a testimonial, what possible business could they have in which he had not a share? The senior deacon, a mild, venerable man, but already half imbecile from age and infirmities, was in the chair; but Mr. Crabb, a cantankerous, ill-tempered bookseller, grizzled, and stooping at forty, sat on the

chairman's right hand, and seemed to be the spokesman of the party.

"I did not know you had any business here this afternoon, gentlemen," said Stanley, taking off his hat, and poking up the fire, which was slowly smouldering out from want of attention. There was no response, but they all looked uncomfortable, as well they might, for they had just composed a letter to a popular London minister, requesting him to preach for several Sundays at Carvary, with a view to settling among them, and they had not as yet given Stanley the smallest hint of their intention.

Jones telegraphed across the table to Smith, Smith whispered to Brown, and Brown wrote something on a slip of paper, and passed it on to Robinson, who nodded to Crabb, who rose ponderously, hemmed, wiped his glasses, hemmed again, and forthwith took up his parable. It was very like "the house that Jack built," or so at least Mr. Stanley thought.

"Mr. Stanley—sir!" said Mr. Crabb, feeling the responsibility of the situation, and bubbling all over with importance;—"as you *are* here—a pleasure which I am sure none of us expected—we may as well anticipate the proceedings of the evening; it seems more candid, in fact, to do so, and candour is a Christian virtue which has ever appertained to the office-bearers of Carvary. We, therefore, would not conceal from you that we have written to the Rev. Joshua Bullivant, requesting him to occupy the pulpit for the two succeeding Sabbaths after next Lord's-day."

"Occupy what pulpit?"

"The pulpit in yonder sanctuary, sir!" And Mr. Crabb pointed majestically over his left shoulder in the direction of the church itself. He would have looked quite commanding but for his shortness of stature and his billy-goat beard.

"*My* pulpit, Mr. Crabb? I am not going from home that I know of. I should prefer preaching myself."

"Carvary pulpit, sir! I scarcely see how it can be *yours*. You are not, and never were, our legitimately appointed pastor."

"I was received by you, and ordained as assistant-

minister in the lifetime of our dear father and pastor, Mr. Grey. A fact, however, which does not, I am well aware, constitute me Mr. Grey's successor; but as I am certainly your pastor *pro tempore*, I claim my right over the pulpit, freely occupying it myself or in the person of my friends, as I—and only I see fit."

"But the pulpit is not yours, Mr. Stanley. We have never recognised you as our sole pastor. You are but, so to speak, a curate; and curates may not legislate for the Church."

"Neither are curates appointed and displaced by 'the Church.' But curates are not acknowledged among Congregationalists. I am your pastor till I resign; and I request that neither Mr. Bullivant nor any other minister be invited till I vacate my post. I shall give in my resignation to-night at the church meeting, and I do not doubt that it will be accepted."

"It will be accepted, sir; and I am very glad to find that you are in so proper a frame of mind. We feared contentions and disputes—I tell you honestly we feared them; you have set our fears at rest."

"You need never have entertained them, so far as I am concerned. Not for the pay of an archbishop and the glory of an apostle would I force myself upon a reluctant people. That I love this place, that I am deeply attached to this people, I do not deny, and I tell you fairly I would have taken up my abode with you thankfully had you so willed it. As it is, I have only to resign; and, as I suppose you will be glad to have the pulpit empty, that you may at once commence operations, I promise you that it shall be at your disposal on the first Sunday in April. Gentlemen, I trust you are satisfied; and what I now declare to you I shall declare to the church, which will meet three hours hence in the lecture-room."

Again there was a dead silence. The young pastor's quiet dignity was more overpowering than any show of righteous indignation could have been. The deacons had their will; but with the perversity common to men as well as to women—though the former pronounce the latter to be the typical perverse being—they no sooner discovered that they need scheme and diplomatise no longer,—that they might, in fact, walk over the ground without even a

show of opposition, than they began to doubt the wisdom, to say nothing of the righteousness, of their behaviour. Even Mr. Crabb could not feel triumphant.

"Don't be premature, sir," cried out Mr. Brown, who secretly favoured Stanley. "We are not the church, you know; the church will probably entreat you to reconsider your decision. I am not sure that we shall easily find a man who will suit us as well as you do. Friends, don't you think some of the fault lies with ourselves? Have we not got into such a stereotyped state—eh, Mr. Crabb?—that we are in danger of—well, I don't quite know of what, but I should say of spiritual pride, darkness, and obstinacy?"

"A traitor in the camp!" muttered Mr. Crabb, so that only his next-door neighbour heard him. He hastened to add aloud, "We can't do better than get into a stereotyped state as far as *truth* is concerned. It's the truth we want, and we do not get it. Mr. Stanley goes in for new lights; he turns our old-fashioned notions topsy-turvey, or would do so if only we were misguided enough to listen to him. You preached a sermon last Sunday as ever was, Mr. Stanley—all about '*works!*' Now, we want faith; we don't want *works*, which are carnal. We want the good old teaching—'By grace ye are saved.'"

"And God forbid that I should attempt to teach you or any one that we are saved in any other way. But you know as well as I do that faith and works must be co-existent; faith without works is a still-born child; a tree that never blossoms; a flame shut up in a dark lantern. Life can no more exist without breathing, the sun can no more shine without giving light, fire can no more burn without heat, than faith can dwell in any man without giving evidence of its reality by works."

"All that is very well; but you don't always put it as plain as that. Why, the other Wednesday evening you preached about nothing but *temper*."

"And is not temper one of the most important evidences of a man's state? and also one that is being continually overlooked? Is there a sin more specious, more hardening than what we commonly call bad temper? But we will not discuss temper now; I am going to the ladies to beg a cup of tea; then I wish to remain undisturbed

time for the church meeting to

tter after that?" said
me were given him to
as ever Stanley was out of

I doubt," said Mr. Robin-
. Brown; we shall not soon
w; we may get a man with
e weight,—a man, too, whose
of us old stagers better: but I
to sink into such a church as that
which was once a burning and a
ow gradually sinking into decay for
bers. It keeps the old ones till they
n they do die, and there are no young
vacant places. All the young people
long ago, and it is to the young people
ter all for building up a cause, and make it
ogress. Fifty years ago, men were content
; but that dull content, that stupid non-
of new truths and new ideas, went out with
coaches. We live by steam now: we elderly
not quite like it, but I suppose the Lord God
s to live so, or things would not be as they are.
s in two or three generations we shall be flying
gh the air, or shooting along by electricity, wonder-
now people could be satisfied with the jog-trot rail-
y that went at forty or fifty miles an hour only. Well!
it be so, that will be God's doing, and men must keep
up to the times, or go utterly to decay. And I say this
young Stanley, whom our dear old pastor loved and
trusted, is a choice youth: he is sound and clever, he is
fearless and not rash. He will be a grand man one
of these days, not many years hence, if he only have
fair play. Indeed, I believe he will succeed, in spite of
any fight against him. It does not matter to him that we
worry him into resigning, though it may hurt him now.
It will be only so much discipline for him, a trial to do
him good; London will have him when we are quit of
him, and I don't see why every good thing should be
monopolised by London I don't see why Bradfield

should not boast of a star of the first magnitude and all its own! I say we are fools to let this young man go, and I shall hold up my hand for him to-night."

"So shall I!" said Mr. Brown. "He is right; God's truth is boundless, and as the ages roll we shall always be gaining new manifestations, and beholding new aspects of that truth. The 'Rule of Three' is of as much importance as ever, and yet we like to study Algebra. It does not follow that the new lights put out the old, though some of them perhaps burn more dimly, or rather seem to do so, just as our street lamps look yellow and pale, and half extinguished under the brilliant electric light. But the street lamps are good gas for all that, though perhaps the day may come when they will be superseded. There! I'm not logical, I know I'm not," said the good stock-broker. "I never was good at metaphor, I was sure always to get into confusion, and flounder about till some one helped me to dry land; but I know what I mean, and what I mean is this—I believe in Mr. Stanley, and I think if we keep him we shall grow into his thought, and this church will prosper, and be a Zion indeed, as it has been these many years; but if we dismiss him, woe be to us! I foresee trouble for Carvary. It may be long before the church will unite in its selection of a pastor, and dissensions may arise, and perhaps there may be a split. I vote against receiving Mr. Stanley's resignation."

"So do I," said Mr. Wilson, a meek-looking man, who hitherto had scarcely spoken.

"And so don't I!" shouted Mr. Crabb. The tide was evidently turning, and he did not like it. "However, it is of very little use two or three of you going about to circumvent the majority. The church, you will see, will be unanimous; it will be all '*ayes*' and no '*noes*,' when it is put to the vote. Every hand will be held up for his departure."

"I am not so sure of that," said Mr. Robinson. "But our time is expired; I have an engagement at five; will some one pray?"

Mr. Wilson prayed; and a very excellent prayer it was—brief, simple, comprehensive; asking guidance for the work which lay before the diaconate and the church generally, committing the whole affair to God, and

beseeching Him to order it to the good of the people and to His own glory, and to keep far from them any spirit of bitterness and self-seeking.

Mr. Stanley spent half-an-hour with the ladies. They were kind and courteous, especially the younger ones; but there was a curious restraint among them. They evidently knew all about the proposed letter which the office-bearers were drawing up and which the church was to endorse that very evening. Mr. Stanley drank his tea and retired to his own vestry.

The hour came for the meeting. The members of the church flocked in. It was a crowded meeting, filling the spacious room to overflowing. The clock struck seven. Mr. Stanley was in his place; the whole diaconate ranged themselves around him in solemn array. The usual hymn was sung, followed by the usual prayer, which said prayer would have intimated to the uninitiated, had other presages been wanting, that peculiar and important business was about to be transacted. But first of all came the ordinary affairs of the evening. They were few and slight, however, and soon despatched, and then there was a pause, a dead hush, and the assembly sat in breathless expectation.

Mr. Stanley rose, and in a very few words tendered his resignation. The members, and especially the deacons, had expected an elaborate speech, an explanation of his views, and a studied and learned defence of what they called his "errors," and they were prepared with, as they believed, satisfactory rejoinders. He simply said in conclusion, "I am aware that my doctrines do not please you; I am sorry for it, but I cannot preach any other gospel than that I have preached to you, neither can I use the old phraseology of a bygone school of thought to suit your tastes. 'I believe, and therefore have I spoken,' and I will not for any man falsify my meaning by using the familiar shibboleths of a theological party. There are men who will teach Emerson and Kant in the language of John Newton. I am not of such; as I cannot, therefore, retract aught that I have expressed, either in word or in sentiment, I request you, in all kindness, to accept my immediate resignation of the office I hold, and have held for several years past, of assistant minister of the Congregational Church of Carvary."

But before it could be put to the vote Mr. Brown arose and made a long and forcible speech, urging Mr. Stanley to reconsider his decision, and pressing upon the church the desirability, not only of retaining him as their minister, but of recognising him immediately as their sole and duly-appointed pastor. Mr. Francis Gilbert, who was not in office, seconded the motion of Mr. Brown. He had a clear, far-seeing judgment, and a certain rugged eloquence, not too polished for the intelligent artisans and respectable tradesmen of Carvary, and it told, every sentence of it, till faint murmurs of assent and encouraging words became hearty outspoken applause. "Hear, hear," resounded from every quarter; then came clapping of hands and stamping of feet, and diligent use of pocket-handkerchiefs on the part of the ladies. The church would have proceeded at once to a show of hands; but Mr. Stanley said to a student friend who was standing near him, "*Audi alteram partem;*" and aloud, "Pray let us hear the other side; it is quite possible that my friends may entirely change their opinions when they have seen me portrayed in what some—many, I fear, of this assembly—assume to be my true and natural colours. Mr. Crabb, will you not say a few words, or many words if you have them to say?"

Mr. Crabb rose, sour, solemn, and portentous. He had a good deal to say, but he said it badly; he overshot his mark, and gave to his utterances so much bitterness, that the venom of his spirit betrayed itself. His partisans cheered him but feebly; and he grew angry when continually he was assailed by cries of "Question, question," or interrupted by vehement shouts of "No, no, no!" And Mr. Crabb did not show to advantage when he was angry. I don't know that he was peculiar in this respect; ill-temper makes us all ugly enough! But his tongue gathered spite as his rage increased, such evident spite, that once or twice his voice, which was unfortunately weak, was drowned by the "Shame! shame!" which echoed all around him. Neither would he have been heard to a conclusion had not Mr. Stanley risen, and with much quiet dignity said, "As chairman of this meeting I must protest against any interruptions. I require that Mr. Crabb be heard patiently and respectfully." And his clear sonorous

tones rose over all the hubbub, and at once commanded silence and due order.

"That's the sort of man," whispered Mr. Brown to his next-door colleague. "I like a man with power, with quiet power in him, you know. Give him his credentials, and he'll hold his own spite of all the old women of both sexes. Now, then, there's Crabb at it again—hammer and tongs—how hoarse he is getting!"

But Mr. Crabb's eloquence had received its death blow, for that evening at least; when his temper got the better of him he always stuttered, and when he stuttered he felt most painfully that he was ridiculous. A few more savage inuendoes, a wild metaphor or two, a single sentence of concentrated bubbling fury, which no one understood, and what he intended to be a long, a majestic peroration, came to an abrupt close. He sat down, evidently worsted, wiping the perspiration away from his forehead with a gaudy pocket-handkerchief. Several members of the church, and also several deacons spoke briefly and mildly, but the speeches of the evening were clearly over. It only remained now to accept or reject by show of hands the Rev. Ernest Stanley's resignation.

"Those who accept this resignation will please hold up the right hand."

A score or two of masculine members—for the Carvary trust-deed forbade women to vote—more than one would have anticipated after the recent enthusiasm, were uplifted. Some people, women of course—women being so much more spiteful than men—were base enough to aver that Messrs. Crabb and Co. held up both their hands.

"To the contrary—*if any!*"

More hands than could be counted instantly uprose; quite a little forest of digitals shone beneath the gaslights. There was no doubt as to which side had the majority; the tellers only smiled; counting hands was such a work of supererogation. Then there was clapping of the hands, vehement applause, and the men, and some of the women, too, pressing round Mr. Stanley with congratulatory speeches and hand-shakes.

"Of course you stay with us?" said Mr. Gilbert, all aglow with the excitement of success.

"Do not ask me now," replied Mr. Stanley; "I am not

sure of myself to-night. Besides, I must ask the Lord what I am to do. Whether I go or stay, I shall never forget this night, nor the words you have spoken. I cannot speak of what I feel, it is all too deep down in my heart; only, I must always remember with gratitude and affection those who have stood by me in the storm."

CHAPTER XIX.

MAGGIE'S CHAMPAGNE SUPPER.

NOR, while these tempests raged at Carvary, was the good ship of St. Oswald's sailing in quiet waters.

Maggie conceived a project. It was not quite original; she had heard of something of the kind before; but the merit of it among her congeners and associates became hers entirely. She had heard the Littles and the Kimbers of the congregation predicting the speedy emptiness of the church, and all at once a bright idea struck her. What a sensation it would produce if some Sunday morning the offending doctor and his curate should find themselves face to face with vacant pews and deserted benches! Maggie knew herself to be a young lady of influence, and she had been shamefully overlooked by those stuck-up heretic Bethells, and it was time they had a lesson. She thought, if she went to work judiciously, that she might achieve something worth talking about—nothing short of a desolate, absolutely empty church! for, of course, the almshouse men and women, and a few of the school children went for nothing. It would be a difficult task, but then Maggie loved surmounting difficulties; certainly it was worth attempting. Only failure would be so ignominious. If she succeeded in her design, she cared

very little whether Dr. Bethell knew or did not know that he had her to thank for his mortification; defeat was what she felt she could not bear.

She fixed upon Sunday week for the exploit, and she proceeded carefully to lay her plans. In the first place, she could not immediately take her mother into confidence, for Mrs. Aston, though swayed by her strong-minded daughter, was of far gentler mould, and particularly disliked the idea of giving any of her fellow-creatures pain; so she would have to be let into the plot by slow degrees. But she would not want for coadjutors; there were plenty who would be delighted to contribute to the discomfiture of the man who had declared that he did not believe the gospel of Leo Bunn.

Her first step was to visit Mrs. Little and Mrs. Kimber. Now Maggie generally did not visit the wives of shopkeepers. But there are times when you must overleap all fictitious barriers; if you are going to do dirty work you cannot be over particular as to the hands of those whom you clasp in fellowship; and so Maggie did not disdain to pay a few calls that, but for this ingenious scheme of hers, might never have been thought of. She not only condescended to the Littles and Kimbers, whom she charmed upon the spot, she went much lower in the social scale, and even, it was afterwards affirmed, though I cannot vouch for it, took a friendly cup of tea with Mrs. Crisp, the muffin woman, and Mrs. Kettle, the nurse, her lodger, in order to discuss the demerits of their pastor, and instruct them in the part they were to take. "For, you see," said Maggie to Lucy Alcott, who would have believed in Maggie had she proposed a second Gunpowder Treason, "I shall want allies of all classes, and I must conciliate the lower orders. Mrs. Crisp and Mrs. Kettle are both old St. Oswaldeans, and staunch Bunnites, and they will reach and influence scores of people whom I do not know, and with whom I should be powerless. Especially, I desire that the *free seats* should be empty."

"Mamma, I have asked a few friends here to-morrow evening," said Miss Aston to her obedient parent that afternoon; "and I thought it would be a good opportunity to get through a lot of the work for the Irish Church Missions Bazaar, so we shall have quite a party, I sup-

pose, and we shall want a very nice tea, and one of your very most charming and elaborate suppers, mammy dear."

"Very well, my love. Of course your friends are my friends, and I am most happy to see them; but it is very short notice. How am I to manage the sort of supper you wish?"

"You must manage it, mamma. We shall have a good deal of business to discuss; and nothing makes people so manageable and so unanimous as really good eating and drinking. Send to Lester's for a few things; their raised pies are always to be depended on, and so are their creams. I shall want plenty of sweet things. I'll make a lot of fancy tarts myself to-morrow morning, and get out the greengage jam and the apricots. Miss Phillips would sell herself into slavery for unlimited apricot preserve."

"Who are to be here, Maggie?"

Maggie ran through a long list, finishing up with, "and ever so many more!—as many as can come!"

Poor Mrs. Aston sat aghast. "Really, my dear," she pleaded, "I don't think I am equal to it."

"If you are not, I am," was the filial rejoinder. "You just attend to your own department, mamma, and leave the rest to me."

"Well, well, I suppose you know what you are about, Maggie," sighed her mother; "and will the Misses Bethell be here?"

Maggie stamped her pretty—very pretty, slender, little rosetted foot till the fire-irons rang again. "Mamma! how can you be so stupid? You know *we* are not on terms with the Bethells!"

By dint of extra help upstairs and down—Maggie and Lucy both working hard for the nonce—wonders were accomplished; and the next evening—it was Thursday—being showery, so many Hansom cabs and flies—or cars the Bradfield people call them—drew up at Mrs. Aston's door, that the uninvited neighbours, who had witnessed all the day the coming and going of the confectioner's boy and other well-known functionaries, at once circulated the report that Maggie and her mamma had become "worldly characters," and were giving—a fancy ball!

How much the Irish Church Missionary Society profited by the party expressly met together for the indirect furtherance of their labours, I cannot declare; but I should say not *much* plain sewing or fancy work was achieved in Mrs. Aston's crowded drawing-room that Thursday evening, though something else was achieved. They caught eagerly at their young hostess's suggestion, every girl and woman of them, for Maggie believed in packed juries, and she had only invited those upon whom she could depend, and she was far too diplomatic to blurt out the scheme as a carefully concocted notion of her own. She threw out the idea gracefully, sportively; with a confidential whisper of "What do *you* think of it?" to one and another of her friends; and she laid her birdlime so cleverly that every bird was caught. Nobody made any remonstrance worth speaking of; a dozen or more entered rapturously into the arrangement, and voted Maggie into the presidential chair. All promised secresy.

"The first thing is to get a list of the regular seatholders," said Miss Phillips, who made the statement at Maggie's instance.

"That will be difficult to procure," observed somebody.

"Not at all," was Mrs. Jennings's brisk rejoinder. "I have an old list that Jennings drew up when he was churchwarden, and it is not so much out of date but that it will serve our turn; and I should not wonder if Mr. Little has not a correct inventory—or what you may call it —of the present seatholders."

So that difficulty was smoothed away, and the list being sent for with a coaxing little perfumed note from Mrs. Little, and being speedily furnished, the ladies formed themselves into a committee with charming alacrity; and Miss Phillips being inducted as secretary, gave her services with all Christian cheerfulness, and prepared to make minutes of the meeting in due business form.

Of course, they all talked together! whenever did a "Ladies' Committee," regular or irregular, *not* talk hard, and fast, and loud in chorus? Only Maggie kept silence till the storm of chatter had subsided, and then with one or two pertinent remarks she reduced the whole affair to order. Everybody undertook somebody in the congregation; a sort of canvass was to be secretly instituted, and

it was calculated that by dint of a little exertion and management every pewholder, and seatholder, and regular attendant at St. Oswald's might be communicated with, and induced to absent himself or herself and family on that particular Sunday.

There were just a few with whom it would be in vain and dangerous to tamper. The Coxes were sworn friends and allies of the Bethells, and they must be let alone; so must the Lupins—but then Mrs. Lupin was gone to Malvern for her health, and Mr. Lupin might possibly spend that particular Sunday with her. It pained the fair conspirators though to think of the Coxes' pew as full as ever—"Only," said Maggie, "they will look so funny, stranded up by themselves; for all near them, before and behind, right and left, are *sure*. How they will keep looking round when the service commences!"

"It is a pity we cannot see them," said Lucy Alcott. "But, Maggie, how about the strangers?"

"That is the worst of it," replied Maggie, with unaffected vexation. "I must confess I am baffled there. I suppose it is curiosity, Dr. Bethell being from London, and new to the town; but there have been a great many strangers lately at St. Oswald's. Still, if the whole regular congregation absent themselves, the strangers will not make much of a show in that large roomy church. The thing will be quite pointed enough."

"Quite! Oh, quite!" echoed all the ladies.

"An excellent lesson," chimed in Mrs. Jennings. "Only I must not let my master know; he would say it was underhand and petty woman's work. I shall get him to St. Stephen's on Sunday week, and just be quiet."

"It may be the turning point in Dr. Bethell's history," said a tall, severe-looking lady, with a hooked nose and hyper-Calvinistic principles. "I have no doubt this excellent scheme of ours is foreordained."

"Pride goes before a fall," shrieked an old woman, in a falsetto voice. "And Dr. Bethell is eaten up with the pride of intellect."

As the evening wore on, all arrangements were completed; nothing remained but to work quietly and determinately—"not talking of it even among ourselves," quoth

the sagacious Maggie—and to abide the issue. How they wished they had not so long to wait!

The supper was all that Maggie could have desired. And she insisted on having champagne up as soon as the heavier viands had been discussed—champagne that the late Mr. Aston had laid in, and that was famous for its vintage. That sparkling wine put the crowning point to the general hilarity, and at a comparatively late hour the company separated, in sweet accord of spirit, and in perfect unanimity.

"I don't see," said Mrs. Aston, wearily, when she and Maggie and Lucy were left alone, "what good it will do to empty the church for one day! If we don't go back, others will, and the next day the pews will be filled again."

"It will show Dr. Bethell that we can make a stand," replied Maggie, with calm reproof. "He will see that he cannot preach all kinds of heresy and retain the good will of his congregation."

"He will see," said Lucy, "that though he is a Church clergyman, he cannot do as he likes, when he likes to do wrong."

"Well! we shall see!" And Mrs. Aston sighed herself off to bed.

She was soon followed by Maggie and her friend, who remained the night. Maggie's last spoken words were—"I will tell you, Lucy, what we two will do: we will go early and steal up into the organ gallery, and peep between the curtains; then we shall see the empty church!" Her last muttered thought was—"My champagne supper has been a decided success!"

CHAPTER XX.

MISS LANE, VICTRIX!

WHAT was called by Maggie and her clique the "St. Oswald's canvass," went on with unremitting diligence. Maggie and Lucy worked hard, and with undoubted judgment, and, as it would appear, with remarkable success. They especially enjoined caution among those who took part in the movement, and all were particularly requested not to talk of it, even among themselves. "For you must see," said Maggie, with the air of an experienced diplomatist, "that if it once gets wind—this little scheme of ours—we shall have had our toil in vain. The enemy will, of course, get up a counter-movement, and the Bethells and their few adherents will strain every nerve to get a congregation together." Little knew Maggie Aston of Dr. Bethell and his family; not one step would he or they have stirred to bring back the recalcitrants, or to fill their places from without. And, as it happened, no one at St. Oswald's Rectory knew what was in store for them till quite late on Saturday evening—too late to make the smallest effort, if they had wished to make one.

Lucy Alcott was an excellent coadjutor, and Maggie found her of so much use—she was both zealous and obedient—that it was agreed she should spend the next fortnight entirely with the Astons. Maggie naturally wanted some one with whom she could converse freely; and her mother, though she put no impediments in the way, evinced so little sympathy that her daughter privately accused her of favouring the other party.

"No, my dear, I don't," replied the meek lady, who had unbounded faith in her brilliant daughter; "but I am too old to get up an enthusiasm of this sort; and, though I don't doubt you are right, you and our friends, in making this unusual demonstration, still I must confess I don't

quite like it. The Bethells will be terribly humiliated, poor things! when they see the empty church; and though they deserve it, perhaps, and it may read them a lesson that may be of real service to them, still I cannot enter into it. You know, my dear, I never was strong-minded; you take after your papa."

"But you will not think of going to church next Sunday?" said Maggie, with sudden alarm. Her mother hitherto had yielded so implicit an obedience, that even this mild protest disagreeably surprised her.

"Oh, no, my dear; how could you fancy such a thing? Of course, I should not think of going contrary to you, who know all about these matters so much better than I do. When I was young, we did not trouble ourselves about theology; we only tried to do our duty. But, of course, people are not content with that now," added poor, simple Mrs. Aston, all unconscious of the sarcasm she uttered. "I only ask you, my dear, to let me alone, and don't ask me to interfere. I can't help being sorry for Dr. Bethell; I dare say it is very weak of me, but I can't, and I feel for his wife. If it had been your dear father, Maggie, that had to be mortified and put out of countenance, I don't know how I could bear it. Wives feel things more than other people; it's their nature to, and I am sorry for Mrs. Bethell. So would you be if you were married."

"Which I am thankful to say I am not," replied Miss Aston, coldly. "I have no opinion of the married state; I prefer single blessedness. You are weak, mamma, there is no doubt about it. All I ask of you is silence, and absence from St. Oswald's."

"Perhaps I shall have one of my bad headaches next Sunday morning," said Mrs. Aston, with a simplicity that provoked Maggie almost beyond endurance. "We don't want excuses, we want principle!" she remarked, with stern severity, as she and her trailing skirts swept from the room, in pursuit of Lucy and her more congenial society.

But things promised fairly, in spite of Mrs. Aston's indifference. Nearly everybody had been spoken to, and nearly everybody had promised to keep away, and to maintain a discreet silence. "I don't believe there will be

two hundred people in the church, and it seats two thousand!" said Miss Phillips, triumphantly, when she and Lucy, and Maggie, and the Calvinistic old maid were assembled in secret conclave on the Wednesday afternoon. "And we have kept our counsel; I do not think it is at all talked about."

"If it were talked about, the cause would be ruined," rejoined Maggie, with emphasis.

"Of course! And it has been difficult to know whom to trust and whom to distrust, but I think we have steered clear of Scylla and Charybdis," replied Mrs. Phillips, who prided herself on her classical tastes. She had read the Iliad and the Odyssey in English verse, and had glanced into the Æneid. "Look at this list, Maggie; it embodies yours and mine, and I have put a mark against every name that we are sure of. The right-hand middle aisle is *quite* emptied, you see, and there are not many left on the other side. It is of no use to sound the Coxes; they would only give the alarm. But the Lanes! what are we to do about them?"

"I really do not know," replied Miss Aston. "Miss Lane hates Dr. Bethell and his preaching, and would, with pleasure, offer him the ecclesiastical Chiltern Hundreds, if there were any such thing! But I am not at all sure whether she would join us in this instance. Sarah Lane is so very peculiar, and not easily talked over."

"And Miss Nora is devoted to the Bethells," interposed Miss Scudamore, the Calvinistic spinster. "Still, it is borne in upon my mind that Sarah Lane will go with us. She is a queer woman, but she is quite, or nearly, sound in doctrine: she holds the precious truth."

"Will *you* call at Salamanca House, Miss Scudamore?" asked Lucy, blandly.

"Oh, no! no, thank you. Miss Lane always makes me so nervous. And, after all, there is no knowing how she might take it."

"But if it is borne in upon your mind?" said Maggie, mischievously.

"Still, I cannot undertake it. I have called on twelve people already, and obtained their pledges; my health will not suffer me to do more."

"And Mr. Lupin, he will be at Malvern, I suppose? He was there last Sunday."

"Sure to be there," said Lucy, with decision. "I saw the housemaid yesterday, and she said her master was going to her mistress as to-day. He will not return till Monday morning. I am glad he is out of the way, he would have been most difficult to deal with—a sort of lion in our path."

"Then if we win Miss Lane over to our side," said Maggie, musingly, "there is really no one of any consequence except the Coxes! Just fancy that large church—and it has such an echo in it when it is empty—with only Mr. and Mrs. Cox and family, and a handful of promiscuous attendants in it! Really, I never hoped for so complete a success!" And Maggie put herself into an attitude supposed to be expressive of humble content. Finally, it was agreed that Miss Phillips and Maggie should call next morning on Miss Lane, and together "brave the dragonness in her den." Both of them felt an uncomfortable trepidation in thinking of the visit, for people who encountered Miss Lane generally got the worst of it, and even Maggie had been put down by her more than once. In spite of Maggie's professions as a communicant, Sunday-school teacher, and a fearless champion of sound doctrine, Miss Lane did not consider her to be "a converted character," and for once she was right.

It is not pleasant to go where we are not appreciated, and where, as we know, our virtues are held too cheap; and Maggie never felt less assured in her life than when the next morning she made her tasteful toilet in order to accompany Miss Phillips. "If Miss Lane had not one of the best seats in all the church—only two behind the Coxes—I would leave her alone," she said to Lucy. "It is quite on the cards, though, that she may stand by us; she does so detest Dr. Bethell, and she is worth trying for. Is my dress looped up quite right, Lucy?"

"No, it almost touches the ground on this side; let me settle it. There, that does charmingly! You do look so beautiful this morning, Maggie dear, that I am sure Miss Lane will be a savage if she says a cross thing to you. Will you have your muff?"

Maggie took her muff, for it was a sharp morning.

Very graceful she looked as she stood on the pavement by the side of poor, plain, showily-dressed Miss Phillips, who had an unfortunate predilection for strong contrasts. Maggie wore a light grey dress of some soft material, carefully looped up—as the fashion then was—over a pretty magenta and black petticoat, distended by a moderate and well-hung crinoline, a dainty black velvet jacket, fitting to her shapely figure, and trimmed with ermine, and a black velvet hat with a white ostrich feather. She carried an ermine muff, her gloves of pearl grey exactly matched her dress, and her short petticoats displayed a pair of slender ankles, and two tiny feet encased in the jauntiest and most expensive of Balmorals. Altogether she made a charming appearance, and she walked along very much like a sprightly pussy-cat on a predatory excursion.

Rhoda let the ladies in, and showed them into the front parlour, where Miss Lane and Nora sat at work. Nora had coaxed her aunt into using that room generally. She thought the look-out, unlovely as it was, preferable to that at the back of the house. The child had been used to snow-capped mountains, olive slopes, flashing waters, and skies of that intense southern blue that blends into violet and lilac; her soul had been steeped in beauty of light and colour ever since it had shone out through her baby eyes; and now it was sorely oppressed by the dull monotony of the smoke-begrimed town of Bradfield. Especially she hated the sitting-room of Salamanca House, with its staring red roses and its solemn-ticking clock; but, above all, she loathed the sight of those dead brick walls, and the kitchen roof, and the five sooty, spindly poplars! Half by stratagem, and half by entreaty, she prevailed upon her aunt to make the front parlour their living-room, using the back sitting-room only early in the morning and at meal times; and so it came to pass that Maggie and Miss Phillips found themselves at once face to face with the formidable lady of the house.

Miss Lane seemed to be doing a little amateur dressmaking, and doing it very badly, though not at all to her own dissatisfaction. Nora was hard at work on what appeared to be a *shirt;* but as neither she nor her aunt had any male relation, the supposition could scarcely be

entertained. Miss Lane looked grim as usual; Nora looked most lovely. Her fresh, youthful bloom, her lithe *svelte* figure—slender, yet well rounded—her exquisite English complexion, and her easy French grace and perfect style, struck Maggie with astonishment and envy. She was dressed quite plainly, for, in the first place, she was in deep mourning; and, in the second place, she was Sarah Lane's niece; but she wore her untrimmed, simple black dress as only a Frenchwoman could wear it, and her *coiffeur* was such as Miss Aston would have given anything in reason to emulate. And Nora, with all a Frenchwoman's appreciation of taste in dress, ardently admired Miss Aston, whom in her own mind she pronounced to be a very beautiful person.

"I dare say you are surprised to see us so early this morning?" said Maggie, with far less confidence than was her wont; those shrewd grey eyes were looking her through and through: she felt as if they saw right into her secret soul, which was by no means the case, for Sarah was not gifted with any nice powers of discrimination—she was simply cautious and exceedingly distrustful, and suspicion came to her as naturally as eating and drinking.

"It is concerning Dr. Bethell we wish to speak to you," said Maggie, sententiously; Miss Phillips never opened her lips; "we are all so greatly concerned that such doctrines should be preached in the pulpit of our beloved St. Oswald's. I am sure you feel with us, dear Miss Lane?"

Dear Miss Lane looked the reverse of sympathetic. "Well!" she said, sharply, "and what then? I suppose you didn't come here to tell me that Dr. Bethell does not preach the Gospel! I found that out for myself long ago."

"Of course you did," replied the courteous Maggie. "I know no one who is a better judge of sound doctrine than yourself, Miss Lane. Dr. Bethell's preaching must have been, and must be still, most distasteful to you!"

"I don't see that that concerns you, or anybody but myself," snapped Sarah, becoming grimmer and sterner, as Maggie became suaver and blander. "What have you come here for—I suppose you have a motive?"

Maggie shook in her Balmorals. Miss Phillips longed

think you extremely pretty and charming; and you have your best things from Paris, which makes a wonderful difference to looks. If I had a Paris bonnet I dare say somebody would call *me* handsome! Of course I should know I was not; it would only be the bonnet that became me so well. Clothes are everything, after all! Don't cry, Maggie, while you are in the street; that boy stared at you with all his eyes."

"I don't care," said Maggie, fiercely. "The good-for-nothing, spiteful old maid! Mr. Bellamy, indeed! As if a lady and gentleman could not be friends without the wasps and hornets of society rising up to sting them. I have no patience!"

The upshot of that day's work was open estrangement between Miss Phillips and Miss Aston, and one of Maggie's most terrible nervous headaches. All that afternoon and evening, and all the next day, she lay on her bed moaning with real bodily pain, her windows darkened, her tender mother watching at her side, and applying cold wet cloths and ice, and urging every possible remedy, from a blue pill to globules of ignatia. Maggie was too ill to think either of her discomfiture or of her coming triumph. Her work was done, so far as she could do it; that was her only comfort, and success was tolerably certain. So she gave herself up to the endurance of her headache, which was about as much as she could endure; those excruciating headaches—which Maggie's friends said resulted from an extremely delicate and sensitive nervous organisation, and which her enemies boldly declared were the issue of tight-lacing—being her most inveterate foes, and they generally came on after any strong excitement, and prostrated her as completely, for the time being, as could any mortal illness. Lucy was sadly afraid that her friend would spend the eventful Sunday in bed, and so miss the delightful sight of the empty church.

But on Saturday morning Maggie awoke free from pain and furiously hungry. She kept herself very quiet all day, dined prudently, took a little walk in the square, and declared herself quite ready for the morrow.

Meanwhile her secret had transpired! So many people knew it, that it was quite impossible but that it should be so. It was talked of at first in whispers, and friends spoke

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CHAPTER XXI.

THE EMPTY CHURCH.

As I told you before, the Bethells by some strange fatality heard nothing of the conspiracy till late on Saturday evening. Nora had begged to be allowed to tell them, but her aunt had replied, "No, child; I won't have you mixed up with it any way. It would only put the Bethells about, and do no good—perhaps hinder the doctor from writing his sermons properly." And Nora had replied, "But, *ma tante*, will they not be greatly dismayed when they behold the empty church?" And *ma tante* had made answer—"There will be no empty church! St. Oswald's will be as full as ever it was in Mr. Bunn's time. We had better be early, for we may lose our own seats; there will be a terrible crowd, I know. I shall make both the girls go, and Mrs. Pegg can come and mind the house; she never does go anywhere on Sunday morning." And Nora was pacified; but she counted the hours till Sunday morning came.

The rumour reached the rectory kitchen before it penetrated drawing-room or library, and Cobb was holding forth to the indignant maids, who wanted to rush out on the spur of the moment, and make everybody they met promise to go to church next morning, when the front door-bell rang such a peal that they all started in alarm, and felt instinctively that a crisis had arrived. "Pray heaven that Miss Haston 'aven't set fire to the church!" said cook, piously. "Or made away with the communion-plate," said the little kitchen-maid, who was immediately snubbed, and told not to talk about what she didn't understand. "I've heard of 'em nailing up the pulpit-door," said the boy who was under Cobb. "And I've heard of gas being turned off," said the under-housemaid. Meanwhile Cobb had answered the door, and there was Mrs.

Lupin, heated and breathless with running all the way from her own house. Cobb thought at first she had run from Malvern. "She was that flustered and incoherent," he explained afterwards.

"Oh, Cobb—my good Cobb! let me in. I must see your master! I know he doesn't see people on Saturday night, and it's close upon nine; but I *must* see him, Cobb! Or your mistress, Cobb, if the doctor is very hard at work; let me in, Cobb, there's a good man, or I shall drop!"

"My master is disengaged, ma'am; leastways, he is taking tea with my mistress and the young ladies," replied Cobb. "I dare say he will see you. Nothing the matter, I hope, ma'am?"

"There's a great deal the matter, Cobb. A vile plot, a wicked conspiracy. Gunpowder treason's nothing to it!"

"Is it about St. Oswald's being empty to-morrow to spite the doctor, ma'am?"

"Then you DO know it?"

"We had just heard it in the kitchen, ma'am; the maids' laundress told us, and she had heard it from the lamplighter, who had it from a young woman who works at the percussion-cap manufactory yonder, which, I think, ought to be put down by Act of Parliament, as exposing life and limb to frightful risks, ma'am; and she—the young woman—said it was all the talk, but was spoke of first in *her* hearing at the butter-shop on Friday evening. And we were just saying, ma'am, begging pardon for mentioning it, that the churchwardens would never allow any such thing; says I, 'Mr. Lupin must hear of this;' says cook, 'He's gone to Malvern to spend Sunday with his lady; as is under the water-cure.' And then, ma'am, you rang the bell; I'll show you in, ma'am, with the greatest of pleasure."

And Cobb straightway ushered Mrs. Lupin into the room where Dr. Bethell was partaking of tea and toast in the bosom of his family. It was an irregularity on Cobb's part; he ought to have shown a visitor into the drawing-room, but he was too much excited to stand upon trifles.

Mrs. Lupin's whole appearance was momentous; it was clear she came as the bearer of strange tidings. The doctor's first fear was that his worthy senior churchwarden

was struck down with paralysis, or seized with typhoid fever, or smashed in a railway accident. It was some minutes before Mrs. Lupin made herself understood, and even then the doctor seemed scarcely able to realise the extraordinary fact—if fact it were.

"So the church is to be empty to-morrow morning, you say?" was his thoughtful rejoinder, when at last he knew all about it, or at least as much of it as Mrs. Lupin could tell him. "And it is Miss Aston's doing?"

"The nasty, spiteful, wicked, audacious hussy," cried Mrs. Lupin; "she'd stick at nothing. She's worse than any heathen—talk of heretics, if we had an Inquisition, I should like to see her in it."

The doctor smiled, though gravely. Mrs. Bethell was very pale. Gertrude and Fanny exchanged glances. So that was what the lavender kid glove meant.

"Don't let us call names," said Dr. Bethell. "I cannot say I feel quite in charity with the young lady at this moment, but I had rather you did not rail at her."

"You are too good to her, Dr. Bethell."

"Rather be too good than too bad. But, seriously, I very much doubt Miss Aston's power to empty my church. That she has done her best, I quite believe; but I shall be very much astonished if she succeeds. She may keep a score or two of the regular congregation away; but I fancy their seats will not be vacant. It is very kind of you, Mrs. Lupin; but do not distress yourself. We thought you were at Malvern."

"So I were," said Mrs. Lupin, too earnest to attend to her Lindley Murray; "and Lupin, he came down to stay over Sunday with me; when this morning comes a nasty telegram—if I hate anything in the world, it's a telegram!—from our manager, saying, the master was wanted on a matter of special importance. Now, you know, in our business hundreds are easier lost than got—why! thousands may turn upon an hour or two; so there was nothing for it but to come back by the next train; and I said to Lupin, 'I'll go back with you, my lad; I'm not going to spend Sunday here alone, and you won't like the house without me to-morrow.' And, says he, 'That I shan't! the house is regularly unked without you in it, so come along.' We got here about

one o'clock, and Lupin praised the manager for sending for him, for he was really wanted. As soon as I had a bit of dinner my maids began telling me, what at first I thought was only a rigmarole of nonsense, and, says I, 'Jemima, you've been gossiping; if you had minded your work you would never have heard such a pack of stuff.' And says Jemima, 'All Bradfield's gossiping, then; but you'll hear more of it before you go to bed to-night.' So I thought I'd go round the back way to Mrs. Gilham, and ask her if she knew aught about it, and I found she did; you might have knocked me down with a feather, Mrs. Bethell, when Mrs. Gilham said, Yes, it was all true, and both she and Mr. Gilham, and their young people, had all promised that wicked hussey to keep away. I came away in a pet. I couldn't trust myself to speak to that Mrs. Gilham, and on my way home I met Miss Wainwright, and she began about it at once; the Wainwrights are Unitarians, you know, but they had heard all about it, and the young men are going to St. Oswald's to see the empty church."

"A great many people will do that, Mrs. Lupin, and then where will be the emptiness?"

"I never thought of that! I should not wonder if they did, for it's all over the town, I hear. About five o'clock Lupin came in for a cup of tea; very serious he was. Says I, '*You've heard!*' and he nodded his head and threw his hands up, which is his way, when he is too upset to say much. However, we talked it over, and we both thought you ought to know, and Lupin would have come himself, only a man from Findingly came in about stuff that is to go by daybreak on Monday morning; so he ran in from his office and said, 'You must go, my dear, you know as much as I do; but tell the doctor, whatever happens, I shall be there to do my duty, and stand by him.' So that's all about it, doctor. As for your other churchwarden, he is Pontius Pilate and Judas Iscariot rolled into one."

"I am not afraid," said the doctor, when at length Mrs. Lupin subsided, and admitted that she could drink a cup of coffee. "If it is God's will that the church should be empty, or only half-empty to-morrow, His will be done. But I shall be rather surprised if it is not remarkably full.

Some will come to see the empty church, and some will come to see how I take my humiliation; then there will be the friends who are staunch to me, and the casual congregation, which of late has greatly increased at St. Oswald's. I do not say the affair does not pain me; it does deeply. I had not thought my people were to be so led away by a cantankerous, foolish woman, though I had my suspicions that a few of them—the Little and Kimber set—were ripe for anything! I will walk back with you, Mrs. Lupin; I should like to say a few words to your husband."

Sunday morning rose bright and clear as it could rise in so smoky a place as Bradfield, and it was unseasonably warm for April—more like June, people said, when they came down to breakfast. Lucy Alcott went early to her friend's room. Maggie was dressing. She was very pale, and there were purple rings still round her great dark eyes, but she declared herself to be quite well. "We had better wear our old bonnets, Lucy," she said. "We cannot be too inconspicuous, and we must go before the bell begins. I would not for worlds anybody saw us."

"You still mean to go, then?"

"Go! I would not miss it for anything! I should like to have a photograph of Dr. Bethell's face when he begins to preach to the empty pews and benches. And it will be something to see that stupid curate's countenance—a most uninteresting brace of curates we have now!"

Here, be it remarked, the curates were like their chief—*unflirtable!* Neither of them paid homage to Maggie's superior charms of face and mind, though one of them had great admiration for Lucy Alcott.

"The organist will be in his place, of course?" said Lucy, after a pause.

"Yes! young Cross is *rather* a Bethellite. I could have managed old Cross, who hates the Gregorians and the whole new school of music the doctor has introduced. However, I suppose it would not have done to silence the organ, so it is just as well as it is. But the choir have struck! I did not know that till yesterday afternoon. We have managed delightfully, Lucy! I feel as if I could organise a State conspiracy if I wished it. The sense of power is very pleasant."

"And so few people can plan, and carry out their plans."

"Very few, indeed. 'Mr. Bellamy says I ought to marry a Cabinet minister."

"You are wonderfully clever, Maggie!" And Lucy looked adoringly at her brilliant friend, who to her partial eyes embodied all the powers, graces, and attributes of Juno, Venus, and Minerva. Maggie said nothing, but she felt that she *was* clever, for though fifty women at St. Oswald's caught at the notion of the empty church, not one could have worked the scheme as she had done. She was a born diplomatist—some might have said an *intriguante!*

"What do the Bellamys do with themselves?"

"I hardly know; my communications were with Mr. Bellamy alone. He understood me at once. He said he would manage it. The governess likes to go to Carvary whenever she can, and she is to have permission to-day to go and take two or three of the children with her. Then he would talk Mrs. Bellamy over directly—no difficult matter, for she is literally without an idea of her own. I dare say they will go out to Ashton, as it is so beautiful a day."

"I only wish we could have gained over the Coxes and Miss Lane."

"It is of no use wishing," replied Maggie, so sharply that Lucy started. "We have done very well; let us be content."

"Oh, yes, of course I am content," said meek Lucy.

Mrs. Aston breakfasted in her own room, so neither Lucy nor Maggie saw her before church time. At half-past nine they went to get ready; at ten minutes to ten Maggie came down, in pearl grey silk, a black silk mantle, richly trimmed with lace, and her new bonnet on—a charming little affair, fresh from Paris—an elegant combination of white chip, tulle, and pink feather and ribbons. "I thought as it was so fine," she explained, "I must wear it." Lucy felt injured, for she had on her winter bonnet of heavy velvet and crumpled flowers—and it came originally from a certain popular shop in Bradfield, which Maggie never patronised. The contrast was too manifest to be agreeable.

"We must go in by the lower gates," said Maggie; "it is the longer way by far, but they might see us from the rectory, if we took the usual path."

It was such a sweet morning; even in St. Oswald's Square the air was pure and fresh; the birds twittered, and the sky was *almost* blue enough to satisfy Nora. But Maggie thought nothing of the beauty of the fair spring day. "I am horribly nervous," she confessed, as she and Lucy came to the porch they must enter to gain the organ loft. Up the winding stone steps they went, into the lobby—into the great gallery, which could hold a vast number of people. The organ loft had been much improved since Dr. Bethell's advent; it had been enlarged, and made quite comfortable for the choir, and the ample curtains of rich crimson had not many weeks been there. Maggie and Lucy exclaimed with delight as they sat down on the soft cushions, and arranged the curtains, so that they could see, and not be seen. A minute afterwards, at the first stroke of the bell, the organist entered. He did not look the least surprised at the presence of the ladies; he bowed gravely, and proceeded to open the organ and arrange the music-books. Maggie, however, was resolved upon a little conversation; at present there was no one in the church, save the head beadle and themselves. "What will you do without your choir, Mr. Cross?" she asked mischievously.

He turned to her and replied, "I shall do very well, Miss Aston; I have provided against any deficiency that otherwise might have occurred. You are going to have a treat to-day!"

"Indeed! a musical treat?"

"Precisely. The fact is, Miss Aston, I heard from my father of your little game, and I highly disapproved of it. Moreover, I heard that the choir, induced by your representations, intended to absent themselves; and, as I was not going to be made a laughing-stock of, I had no mind to perform solos on the organ; so I went to some of my professional friends, set the case duly before them, and requested their assistance. They at once promised it, and will be here presently; so to-day I shall have a choir indeed, quite a little musical festival! Now, I must go to the vestry and speak to the doctor about the hymns. There

will be plenty of room for you ladies, even if all my friends and their friends arrive."

"The wretch!" hissed Maggie, pale with anger, as young Mr. Cross ran down the stairs. All was silent; they could hear the ticking of the clock, and the petulant little bell tolling for service, in the cavity of the mammoth extinguisher, close at hand. Presently crept into the right hand gallery, a lady—a woman, at least—in black, and closely veiled. She glanced timidly round her, and hesitated; then she stole on tip-toe down to the front pew, behind the pulpit, and settled herself in the corner close to the wall, where she could see the empty church in all its nakedness. It was Miss Phillips, in disguise! Her own seat was a very good one, quite among the *élite* of the congregation, in the body of the church; the organ loft had not occurred to her, or she did not dare invade it.

The little bell went on, tolling the slow quarter, and doing its best. Several people entered and stood about the aisle—not many, though—the beadle came and put the most respectable of them into pews, to Maggie's intense indignation. A few strangers sat down in the free seats, which were tolerably comfortable, quite as much so as the cattle-pen pews. By-and-by there were stragglers in the galleries, but, of course, they made a very poor show in the wide, roomy church, into which the morning sun was shining so pleasantly. Exactly as the second quarter commenced, and the bell began to be in a hurry, there were sounds of feet in the aisle beneath; these came from the Coxes, who arrived in great force, the whole family and two visitors besides; they not only filled their own pew, but half another. Portly Mr. Cox went off to sit in the churchwardens' pew, which was under the great gallery, where, of course, Maggie could not see him. The rector's pew was on one side the vestry door, and the churchwardens' pew on the other, so the Bethells were equally secluded from the gaze of the enemy.

Almost following the Coxes, came Miss Lane and Nora, and their two maids; and then!—oh, Maggie could have screamed; as it was, she ground her teeth with rage—for there was Mrs. Bellamy, with a bonnet on that beat Maggie's all to nothing. Behind her came the governess and seven young Bellamys, and—horror of horrors!—Mr. Bellamy

himself, leading his youngest little girl by the hand. "Faithless, perfidious! just like a man!" murmured Maggie to herself. Other people came in twos and threes, but Maggie saw no one save the renegade Bellamy!

"I am afraid it won't look so *very* empty!" whispered Lucy, as people flocked in quite alarmingly—"and it's not quite twenty minutes past." Before Maggie could collect her outraged senses, there was a strange hollow sound—a confused murmur, deep, not loud—it was like the tide coming in afar off; then the tramp of many feet—and they knew that the multitude was at hand! Not a crowd—a mere crowd—but a great multitude, seething, and rustling, and hustling each other, with as little want of decorum as might be. Up the aisles they came—a living flood, which swept all before it; into the galleries they poured. They took French leave, and put themselves into pews—it was "first come first serve" that day at St. Oswald's.

Mr. Lupin, Mr. Cox, Mr. Jennings, and, alas! the traitor Bellamy, turned pew-openers for the nonce, and did their very best to accommodate the mass of strangers. Every pew was filled, packed as full as it would hold, and fuller! Many a crinoline—it was the era of crinolines—was smashed and jammed, and reduced to hopeless, abject shapelessness. In the galleries there was neither sitting nor standing room for another person. Once more arose the question in timid minds—"Are the galleries safe? Will they bear?" For never, no, never, even in the zenith of Parson Bunn's glory, had they been so tried. Maggie would have retired willingly, but she knew she would have to fight her way out against wind and tide, and she might be recognised. Besides, flight was the outward and visible sign of ignominious defeat. That it was defeat—most ignominious, most entire—she was obliged to own; but she determined to stay and brave it out. Indeed, she had no alternative; the chances were she could not have escaped from the church if she had tried, for the crowd thickened even when it seemed as if it could thicken no more, and still the cry was—"They come! they come!"

A little before the half-hour came Mr. Cross, pale and breathless, escorting his choir, most of whom Maggie knew to be public singers of note. He had had a hard

fight for it. "I don't like your empty church, Miss Aston!" he said, significantly; and the strange choristers turned and stared at her. All things considered, it was not so very ill-bred of them; but Maggie, fallen from her high estate, and writhing in the dust of mortification, did not like it, and could scarcely keep back the passionate hot tears.

Mr. Cross commenced his finest voluntary, but he had to play it twice over; it was twenty minutes to eleven before the curate, looking terribly scared, made his appearance in the reading-desk. It had been an affair of toil and time to get the two clergymen up the aisle, for the vestry was, unfortunately, at the very end of the church—being, in fact, the ground-floor of the huge flour-dredger that St. Oswald's called its tower. By the time Dr. Bethell reached the chancel, he had had about enough of it. It was remarked that he remained in prayer, with his head bowed on the communion-table, a long time.

"It is to be hoped no one will faint," said Miss Armstrong, the first soprano in the county; "no one could be carried out."

Lucy put down her black veil, and cried quietly behind it; Maggie's dainty bit of blonde and tulle was of no service, and she could have torn her pink feathers into shreds—they looked so conspicuous, she knew. She felt that her hiding-place was known. Mr. Cross had published her whereabouts when he went down to the vestry; and the *ex-officio* choir who were giving their services, to complete her humiliation, eyed her curiously.

"We are going to have a hymn first," whispered Mr. Cross to his leaders. "It is not our usual order, but we thought it would tone the congregation down a little. There's nothing like 'All people that on earth do dwell for solemnising the mind. And it will give Mr. Bartlet time to recover his wind, which must be half squeezed out of him."

Dr. Bethell gave out the Psalm, and the grand words in his grand voice rang out from one end of the church to the other. Mr. Cross, his face all aglow, played the tune in his best style—the fine Old Hundredth of the sixteenth century; and then they began, choir and people, such a strain as put to shame the finest choruses of the oratorios

of Handel—so, at least, said the newspapers next morning, for the reporters were there in full force. They had come like legion to take stock of the empty church.

At the end of the second verse there was an echo—the last half-bar of the tune being repeated—somewhere! It came again and again, and grew clearer, stronger—more like a repeat and less like an echo, though it was only a note or two. "What is it?" whispered Lucy, greatly perplexed. Maggie knew well enough, and so did many other people: thousands who could not obtain admittance to the church itself remained outside; all the windows were open and all the doors, and the lobbies and porches were thronged with worshippers; they could follow the service outside as well as in. And they did follow it, making all the responses duly, and joining in all the chants and hymns. It was a wonderful service: it has never been forgotten to this day. The crowds were orderly and reverential, and did their best to accommodate each other. Seats were fetched from the schoolroom for the congregation in the churchyard, and they took turns of sitting and standing throughout the morning. The multitude was as well-behaved and reverential as such a multitude, so brought together, could be. But Dr. Bethell hoped he should never address such another congregation. He never dared look towards the curtained pew where his wife and daughters were. The moment Dr. Bethell was in the pulpit, the stairs were appropriated. He was very pale, as he looked down on that wide, surging sea of faces. His text was, "We would see Jesus." The first few sentences were slightly tremulous, his anxious wife thought; but in a few minutes his voice was clear, strong, and resonant as ever; he warmed to his subject, the inspiration of the preacher came over him, and lighted up his countenance; and he saw, not the crowded church, nor miserable Maggie, cowering in her eyrie—for the choir curtains had been pushed back, as far as they could go, for air—but the hills and plains of Palestine, the flowery shores of Galilee, and the Temple of Jerusalem, "the earth's one sanctuary;" and the Master Himself, clad in the weeds of our mortal flesh, teaching in the midst of His disciples. He seemed to hear the voice of his Lord, saying, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you

rest." His silent prayer had been, as he entered the pulpit, "Oh, my Lord, give me grace to forget myself; and give me strength to preach Thy Word, and Thine only, to this people! Speak to them through me, if it be Thy will."

And his prayer was heard and answered. The notes he had prepared so carefully he never used—he never once needed them. God gave him words, and he spoke with a mighty power that thrilled the vast assembly, and hushed the very hearts of those before him. There were many who never forgot that morning's sermon—many who, to the end of their days, thanked God for the foolish rumour of the empty church, which had carried them to St. Oswald's. So out of seeming evil does the good Lord bring the greatest good. He maketh even the wrath of man to praise Him! The sermon was longer by ten minutes than the one which the doctor had intended to deliver, for he could not stay the forceful words that rose unbidden to his lips: he *must* deliver all his message, he *must* say all that his Lord and Master bade him. And no one thought it long, no one wished the sermon at an end. Maggie looked down once, and there were all the eager, upturned faces, while around her were moist eyes, through which the yearning soul shone out. But *she* never listened to the message of peace and love; she was mortified, cut to the quick; but not repentant, not subdued. The gentle "Come unto Me" had no significance for her. Poor, miserable, conquered—yet unconquered—Maggie!

It was over at last; how she longed for, and yet dreaded, the conclusion of the service! "Now to God the Father," said Dr. Bethell, as he closed his little Bible and laid it on the pulpit-cushion; and the great multitude rose with one accord, and stood upon their feet. Looking down from the organ-gallery, or from the pulpit either, it was a grand and solemn sight; and the deep sound of their rising was grand and solemn too—almost like low, distant, murmurous thunder. It was grander still when thousands of voices sang—

"Jerusalem the golden,
With milk and honey blest;
Beneath thy contemplation
Sink heart and voice opprest.

I know not, oh! I know not
What joys await us there;
What radiancy of glory,
What bliss beyond compare."

It was the voice of a multitude that kept holyday. It was like faint echoes of the "everlasting song," as the voice of many waters! And the congregation outside the church joined in with heart and soul, keeping very good time too, and the great organ uttered its melodious thunders. The choir sang its very best, but the pure silvery sopranos, and the rich contraltos, and the mellow basses and tenors were lost in that great sea of sound, amid those waves of choral harmony, those floods of soaring praise. Never will any who were there forget that wonderful music of voice and soul that filled all the large church and all the churchyard as well, and died away in far-off streets and courts, and fell upon the ears of astonished idlers, and roused the wonders of passers-by returning from service in other churches. There was something unearthly in the full deep melody of the last verse—

"And now we fight the battle,
And then we wear the crown
Of full and everlasting
And passionless renown.
O land that seest no sorrow!
O state that know'st no strife!
O princely bowers! O land of flowers!
O realm, and home, and life!"

It was truly "the song of them that triumph," "the song of them that feast" upon the immortal food of God's beloved ones. Then the blessing of peace, and the solemn hush of the kneeling multitude, and then the deep "Amen." All was not over even then. Mr. Cross, turning to Miss Armstrong and his German friend, the celebrated tenor, said, "Shall we play them out with the 'Hallelujah Chorus'?"

And Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" he did play, but he played no one out of the church! Those who had begun to move stood still at the first sound of the familiar opening bars; a few voices mingled with those of the choir, then more and more, till all joined heartily. Never was that chorus better given in any assembly. The perplexed out-

siders beyond the churchyard gates came to the conclusion, or rather to two conclusions, that a tremendous "revival" was going on, and that the Archbishop of Canterbury was preaching for Dr. Bethell, and demanded full cathedral service.

It took a long time to clear the church, as you may imagine, after the "playing out" was over. Lucy began to think the people meant to stay there and wait for evening service. Maggie decided that she must wait till all were gone, though Lucy urged that they should slip into the crowd, and get away unnoticed. But Maggie was obstinate, and won the day as usual. Lucy always yielded to her.

"There, now," pleaded Lucy, when Mr. Cross and his company had left them alone, "do come now, Maggie. We should not be much crushed; suppose some of those rude street-boys who know us should shout at us." But still Maggie sat like a stone, her clear-cut, delicate face awfully fixed and white under its pink and white finery. Lucy was almost in despair. All at once some one came into the singing-gallery; it was Mr. Cross, looking serious. "Miss Aston," said he, "allow me to see you home. I am sorry to say your share in to-day's exploit has got abroad in the town; and the Bradfield roughs are very rough, you know, and will not be restrained by any chivalric considerations for your sex."

Maggie's black eyes were full of terror; poor Lucy felt as if she were going to be torn into pieces by an infuriated mob. They had not bargained for this sort of thing. Maggie put her hand to her head and looked wild, but made no answer. Mr. Cross grew impatient; he wanted to get home to his dinner, yet he could not for manliness' sake or in common charity leave these two women to face the foe alone. For it was quite true, that of which he came to warn them—crowds of idle and disorderly folk, getting scent of the unusual proceedings of the day, gathered from all quarters and came up to St. Oswald's to witness the dispersion of the congregation. They, too, heard the wonderful singing, and beheld the wonderful congregation round about the church; and Maggie's name, which had been whispered from the beginning, was presently bandied about in a way that would

have appalled her had she heard it, as Mr. Cross did. "Let's hiss her when she comes out, the jade!" was the first kindly proposition; and really, a good hiss would have done her no harm. Mr. Cross would not have interfered to save her from that. But the feeling grew into coarse, unreasoning passion. Nothing would serve the crowd but that they must mob Miss Aston, and follow her to her home; and Mr. Cross and others perceived that she would be grossly insulted, if not exposed to personal violence. And he, and Maggie too, as she crouched among the cushions, could hear the hoarse, discordant murmur of the crowd, getting tired of waiting for their victim. Mr. Cross did not like the situation at all; he began to wonder whether he had not better go back and secure a strong escort of police, and a cab from the nearest stand; but when he tried to move, Lucy clung to him and sobbed, and Maggie held out her hands in speechless agony of fear.

The church was quite empty now, and most of the doors were shut. Only one old verger waited the departure of the trio in the organ-gallery. Suddenly they heard quick, firm steps coming up the stairs, and in another minute Dr. Bethell was among them. "Miss Aston," said he, "I am come to take you home in my carriage; I am sorry to say you will be insulted if you try to walk. I will protect you. Come, there is no time to be lost."

Maggie shrank away from him much after the fashion of a frightened, stubborn child. He made no more ado, but picked her up in his great, strong arms and carried her off as if she had been his own little Herbert. In the lobby downstairs was Gertrude, with an old mourning bonnet of her own, and a black veil. "Wear these, please," she whispered, as she untied Miss Aston's pink strings. "I'll put your bonnet in the vestry." Dr. Bethell took Maggie on his arm, Gertrude walked on her other side, Mr. Cross followed with Lucy.

Now, it never occurred to the crazy mob that Dr. Bethell would conspire to cheat them of their fun, which must be his own revenge; so they stupidly let him and his two daughters, as they imagined, pass quietly, though they were a good deal puzzled, those of them, at least, who had the sense to put two and two together, by the fact

that Dr. Bethell had walked home some time before, and had gone back to the church—such a little distance—*in his carriage*. Mr. Cross and Lucy were regarded with suspicion, but some one who knew the organist pretended to recognise Miss Alcott as one of the great singers, so they escaped, and followed in the wake of the other three. The moment they were in the carriage the coachman drove on, making as if he wanted to go right up into the town; but directly they were clear of observers he turned into a bye street, and made a circuitous return to the neighbourhood of St. Oswald's, and finally landed Maggie safely at her mother's house.

Dr. Bethell led her to her own door, and saw her and Lucy safely over the threshold; then, with a quiet "Good day," he jumped into the carriage, and was quickly driven back to the rectory, where you may be sure Mrs. Bethell, Fanny, and Laura were eager enough to hear the conclusion of the story. "It is more than she deserved," sobbed Madge Bethell; "but I am so glad you did it, William dear!"

I need not say Maggie chose to remain at home for the rest of the day. The church was not so thronged at night, but there was an immense congregation, and the perfidious Mr. Bellamy was there again, in his accustomed place. Maggie shut herself up in her own room, refusing even the solace of Lucy's society. Every now and then she heard through the open window high-pitched voices, making remarks on her as they passed. "That's where she lives, the ——" was shouted once. She was called a name far too ugly to be repeated. Like all other heroines in extremity, she did a heroine's duty under the circumstances, and had brain fever! And in her wild delirium she was always in the overcrowded church, or fleeing from the mob, or shrinking from Dr. Bethell, crying, "I *won't* have you heap coals of fire on my head!" Lucy helped to nurse her; but her idol was shaken on its throne. Maggie had lost her influence, and she never afterwards regained it. In short, Lucy was penitent, and she never rested until she had been to Dr. Bethell, and asked him humbly to forgive her; she saw now in its true colours the enormity of her mistake; she determined to make all the amends she could, and she became in

...l smiled, he could not help it. "My dear ... said, "as you are Miss Aston's mother, we ... argue the point. I can only hope that similar ... however pure, may never again influence your ...'s actions. Half a dozen such women would turn ... county upside down."

"...ll, doctor, I beg your pardon, I cannot do more ...hat. I ought never to have given my countenance, ...citly, to the plan; I ought openly and decidedly to ...iscouraged it from the very beginning. But Maggie ... did have her own way; she is clever, and I am not. ... when she was quite a little girl she would please ...f. She takes after her dear father. My dear hus... was always noted for his firmness and decision of ...acter, and I am afraid my weak, wavering ways must ...ve troubled him sorely. He had great patience with me, ...t it was my best comfort when I found out that our only ...ild was likely to resemble him."

Dr. Bethell privately thought that if the deceased Mr. Aston was of the same temper and temperament as his daughter, he must have been an extremely unpleasant person. He only said, "Unless firmness and decision rest on a safe basis, they are qualities which, though admirable in themselves, may lead to fatal results. Firmness in wrong-doing is simple obstinacy and stubbornness; no longer a virtue, but a vice. And Miss Aston is not over-wise, she ought to submit herself to your guidance."

"Ah, doctor, that is my great trouble! I am not fit to guide my child; if she had been under wiser, stronger influence, all this would never have happened. But for myself, I ask your forgiveness."

"My dear Mrs. Aston, there is nothing to forgive as far as you are concerned—literally nothing! As for Miss Aston, I freely pardon her—I forgive her malice against myself. She did me no injury, but great good, in the world's estimation; the evil she plotted recoiled on her own head, poor girl. She has made me the most popular preacher in the town—not that I prize the distinction, for somehow, it is not the most popular men amongst us who are the most useful; it is not the man who draws the largest crowds who does the most work for his Master.

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

"I know—he [illegible] me. I hate Dr. Bethel!"

"Oh, my dear child, it must not be," ejaculated Mrs. Aston. "I am sure you do not mean it. You would not commit so terrible a sin. I am certain."

"I do mean it. I hate Dr. Bethel: I repeat it! You need not look so shocked, mamma. It is the truth, and you had better accustom yourself to it. Even Dr. Bethel says that a truth, however rough and naked, is better than a falsehood wrapped up in silk and velvet. I am no hypocrite: and I cannot pretend that I am reconciled to people from whom I feel myself eternally estranged. I have been foiled, defeated, humiliated, my name has become a by-word in the town. I can never, never forgive my wrongs."

"But, my child, you brought them all upon yourself. I never liked the scheme from the first, for I felt that it would in whatever way it worked—bring you too much before the public. When you undertook to empty St. Oswald's Church you became public property, Maggie."

"Did anything get into the newspapers?"

That was the question she had been longing, yet not daring, to put, ever since she had been able to think and talk coherently. Her pale lips quivered, and her eyelids trembled, as she waited for her mother's answer.

"Well, my love," replied Mrs. Aston, guardedly, "it was noticed, of course—the local press would be sure to notice such a thing."

"Was it noticed in a paragraph, or had it a column or two all to itself? Tell me the very truth, mamma, I *will* know! If you don't tell me, I will get the facts out of some one else. Now, then, how many columns were devoted to the interesting story?"

"Several, I think."

"You *think?* Oh, dear mamma, I wish you could manage to be sure about things."

"Now, Maggie, do be patient; this excitement is so bad for you. Do you think I was likely to read newspapers when you were lying between life and death? There might have been two columns, there might have been three; I cannot say."

"In the Monday's papers? or was it on Tuesday?"

"I forget; it was Tuesday, I believe."

The fact being that the local newspapers, one and all, had seized with avidity upon a theme so fruitful, so rich in materials of all sorts. They had not only columns and paragraphs, with all kinds of sensational headings, but "leaders" had been written on the subject; other country journals took up "the wondrous tale" when the Bradfield press had worn it threadbare, and it was even told, though briefly, in some of the London papers; while the *Times* itself, in a clever article on church policy, made passing reference to "the late Bradfield comedy." Poor Maggie! she had intended to enact a solemn and most impressive drama, in which she was to be leading lady, and win thunders of applause; and lo! the play was played out, the curtain had fallen, and she found herself the heroine of a mere burlesque, the author of a farce, which the audience hailed with cries of ridicule and virtuous condemnation.

When Maggie had the courage to look at herself in the glass, she started in dismay. Her hair had been cut quite close to her head, and it stuck out in little short fuzzy curls, that were plentifully streaked with grey; the delicate bloom of her cheeks was gone. Maggie Aston was the wreck of her former self, and she at once recognised the painful fact.

Mrs. Aston began to have a very trying time with her daughter. She had to cope, not only with the natural weariness and fretfulness of a convalescent, but with much actual ill-temper and irrational caprice. Now she would not stay upstairs a day longer; and then, when the drawing-room was made ready for her reception, she sullenly refused to leave her chamber. One day she resolved to go out at once, and brave the world; the next

she declared that she would never put her foot out of doors in Bradfield again. They tried to tempt her appetite with every nourishing dainty that culinary skill and affection could devise or procure, and she put them all away—jellies, and soups, and blancmanges, and light puddings—with an air of disgust, and asked for something else, which could not possibly be had. They brought her luscious strawberries and juicy hot-house grapes; they brought her forced peaches, apricots, and blooming ripe greengages, and she would have none of them; she wanted oranges and Ribston pippins. When she cried out for something savoury they made her chicken *rissoles*, and even *croquettes* of lobster—though the latter were voted unsuitable to her condition—and she would not even look at them, but waved them away, and demanded oyster-patties. Were ever women so tried as Mrs. Aston, her indefatigable cook, and the hired nurse? Surely the fever still lingered in the brain of the wayward damsel. The nurse would have taken herself away had she not been in most excellent quarters and generously paid, and also genuinely sorry for the oppressed and harassed mother.

One day Mrs. Aston was called downstairs to see some visitors, and as she was leaving the room with a visiting-card in her hand Maggie imperiously demanded who was below. "Only Miss Cooper, my dear, and one of the little Bellamys."

Now Miss Cooper was Mrs. Bellamy's governess, and Maggie did not wish to see her. Even in her palmiest days she had never been able to conciliate Miss Cooper, who repelled all her advances, and coldly rejected her patronage; naturally she now shrunk from her in this the hour of her humiliation. But she thought she would like to see the child if it were one of the younger ones. The two elder girls had been prejudiced against her, she told herself. In spite of this recusancy, she wished Mr. Bellamy would call upon her. She would see him; and she made her mother put pink rosettes in her cap, that she might look less death-like should he come. For, strange to say, she relied still on the friendship of Mr. Bellamy. She had yet to discover that flirts can never count upon the friendship of any man, except the very worst.

"Which child is it?" she asked her mother.

"I cannot tell; Ellen only said, 'One of the children.'"

"If it is Clara or Louie I do not want to see either; but if it is Annie or Johnnie send up whichever it may be—the very little ones never go out with Miss Cooper."

"You are not equal to it, my dear."

"Yes, I am. If it is Johnnie I must see him; he is my favourite."

"Perhaps Miss Cooper will not consent, and perhaps the child will be afraid."

"I should not think of asking Miss Cooper's consent, and the child will come, I know, and it is not as if there were any infection; people don't catch brain fever any more than they catch broken legs. Now, don't loiter, mamma; that word 'perhaps' always makes me nervous."

And Mrs. Aston dutifully disappeared. It was the favourite Johnnie who accompanied the governess, and he was quite willing to go upstairs, being stimulated thereto chiefly by the curiosity which possessed him as regarded the heroine of St. Oswald's. Now, Johnnie was a very smart little fellow, and a good deal spoilt into the bargain. Also he had heard many things to which no one supposed him to be listening, and conversations which he only imperfectly comprehended, but which he perfectly remembered, had been incautiously carried on when he was present. There is no greater mistake than to talk freely before children of that which it is inexpedient that they should report, under the supposition that they do not listen, or listening do not understand. And Master Johnnie Bellamy had heard much, both in the drawing-room and in the nursery, that was not intended for his benefit. His governess and his mamma had discussed certain matters very freely and very warmly while he built brick castles, or exercised his soldiers on the carpet. His papa, too, had not been so reticent as he might have been; and while Johnnie, as son and heir, and prime darling, sat on the paternal knee after dinner, munching ripe strawberries, he drank in much to which no one imagined he was attending, being apparently absorbed in an elysium of fruit and cream.

Johnnie came boldly into Maggie's room; but when he had shut the door he began to feel rather uncomfortable. The white-robed invalid on the sofa was not at all like the

Miss Aston who had chatted and romped with him, and given him "goodies" on former occasions. Her great black eyes frightened him, for he was only seven years old, and, like many children of his age, the sight of a sick person oppressed him with a nameless and a disagreeable awe; it was almost as bad as being in the room with a dead person, he thought.

"Come here, Johnnie," said Miss Aston, holding out her hand; "it is very good of you to come and see me."

Johnnie was silent; he stared in her face for a moment, and then glanced aside to a table, whereon were placed grapes, apricots, jellies, lemonade, and other delicacies, which Maggie despised, but which Johnnie at once appreciated.

"Should you like some of that fruit, and some cake, and lemonade?" said Maggie, coaxingly.

"Oh, shouldn't I!" replied Johnnie, regaining his confidence. He was quite at ease again with his old friend, who could dispense such charming gifts. "What shall I have first, Maggie?"

"What would you like? You may take just what you choose."

"I should like one of these pretty things; are they yellow plums, or very ripe apples?"

"Neither. They are apricots; they are very nice. Help yourself, Johnnie."

Johnnie needed no pressing. He drew up his chair, and at once commenced a raid upon the apricots. Having cleared the dish, he ate a large bunch of grapes, took a few spoonfuls of jelly, and finished up with a fine slice of pound cake, and a hearty draught of lemonade. "There, I've had enough!" he said presently, pushing himself back from the table, and wriggling down from the chair. "I'll come and see you every day, Maggie;—that is, if mamma and Miss Cooper will let me," he added, with prudent reservation, as the visit terminated, and Johnnie hastened to rejoin his governess, who was waiting for him below.

For two whole days Maggie was very quiet. She spoke little and thought much; and, on the whole, behaved so much better and was so much more reasonable, that the nurse began to anticipate a relapse. But all the while

Maggie was slowly improving, and at length she said, "Mamma, I want to speak to you."

"Very well, my dear; what is it?"

"I have made up my mind to leave Bradfield."

"The doctor thinks you may safely go next week, and the lodgings are taken from next Tuesday. The sooner you are away from this the better—the sea air and fresh scenes will work wonders."

"I do not mean that. I have decided to leave Bradfield for good."

"Leave Bradfield for good! Go away and live elsewhere, do you mean?"

"Yes, that is just what I mean. I am tired of this place; I shall go and live in London."

Mrs. Aston burst into tears. "You don't mean it, Maggie?—say you are only teasing me! I don't mind your making a little fun, but I can't bear it kept on. I could not leave Bradfield."

"I do not ask you to leave it, mamma. You can still keep on this house, you know. I suppose you would not like to let it, and it is yours for your life. And you can come and see me in London as often as you please."

"Maggie, Maggie!" wept poor Mrs. Aston. That the child whom she adored should be willing to separate herself from her was the climax of bitterness and pain! She at Bradfield, and Maggie in London, uncared for and unprotected!—she fell into an agony of sobbing, as she contemplated the picture. "Are you quite in earnest?" she asked, at length, when she grew calmer, and felt that the crisis must be met—somehow.

"Quite, mamma!"

"But you were born in Bradfield, Maggie, in this very house!—it was all open country, cornfields and meadows from this to Ashton, then—and your father was born in the old town, and I was born within a stone's-throw of Carvary."

"Never mind where we were born! If everybody lived always in their native place, what a queer world it would be! Bradfield might have been decent once, but it is horribly vulgar, and dirty, and stupid now. I cannot see why any one should cling to it."

"Your father and I were married in Ashton church; we could see the spire of it from the upper windows till a year

or two after he died. And then, there is his grave! I tell you, Maggie, I never, no, never! could desert your dear father's grave. I was a poor foolish wife for him, I know; but he loved me always, and I loved him. And, oh! I wish it would please the Lord to let me lie down with him in the place that's kept for me in St. Oswald's churchyard."

"Oh, dear, mamma, how foolish you are! Who wants you to desert papa's grave? Any one would think I proposed going to New Zealand, and I don't even ask you to go with me to London, unless you like it."

"You can't live alone in London."

"I shall never marry, and I do not see why I should not have an establishment of my own. I have plenty of money; why should I not spend it? Indeed, when I am settled in London, I think I shall advertise for a companion, and seek out a good maid, and a reliable courier, and travel on the Continent. Ladies go everywhere now, even to Egypt and to Jerusalem; and why should not I? I can afford to do it handsomely. There, don't cry, mamma, I am not going to Jerusalem this year. I shall go nowhere till I have arranged my household in town. I shall live at Kensington or Wimbledon, I think, or perhaps at Richmond; there are very good houses at Streatham Hill. To be on a good line of railway is the great thing in these days. My first journey will be to Paris. Why! I have not been to Paris since I was at school there,—and that is more than sixteen years ago! Of course I shall want you to help me choose my furniture, and form my establishment; I must have a good carriage and a fine pair of horses."

And so it all came to pass, and Mrs. Aston had to reconcile herself to the change. And, after all, it was, perhaps, best, she said, that Maggie should leave her native town, since her unlucky escapade would never be quite forgotten, and something would continually be arising to annoy her. After a few weeks at Llandudno, Barmouth, and Aberystwith, mother and daughter went together to London; and when late in the autumn Mrs. Aston came back to Bradfield, she was alone, Maggie having settled herself very comfortably at Bayswater. Her mother was to pay her a visit during the winter, and early in the spring she was going abroad in order to be in Rome during Holy Week.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MARY AND MARTHA.

IT is time we went back to Miss Lane and to Nora, who is really the heroine of this story—if, indeed, it have any particular heroine at all. The aunt and niece had got on together much better since Nora's stay at St. Oswald's Rectory; perhaps Nora had learnt more self-control, and was falling more into English ways and habits. And Sarah, too, when she was not in one of her "moods,"—and she had had them less frequently and less violently since Christmas—could be a tolerably pleasant companion. Rhoda said she had never known her mistress so nice and Christian-like since she came to live with her; and even Ann admitted that "she was not such a bad sort after all, when you came to know her, only you must make up your mind to put up with her temper!" Sarah had made very little difference in her way of living; she could not as yet comprehend that where she had once spent pence she might now spend pounds; she had somehow got a notion, partly inherited from her miserly father, and partly the result of her sordid bringing-up, that it was wicked, under any circumstances, to spend a great deal of money. Parsimony was in her eyes a cardinal virtue, and to be sedulously cultivated; and when, in a fit of unwonted generosity—she had these fits occasionally, though she always repented of them afterwards—she presented Nora with a really handsome set of jet ornaments, she was by no means certain that she had not acted very foolishly, if not very wrongly.

As the winter passed away, she began to go out and visit her friends and acquaintances; and on these occasions she generally took Nora with her. Her friends were few in number, extremely few!—that is to say, the number of those who cared for her personally, for her very self

alone, were so few, that you might have counted them all on the fingers of one hand, leaving out the thumb. But a woman with half a million of money need never lack *seeming* friends; and Sarah Lane might have visited over half the country, and conducted herself with her usual unpleasantness to boot, and received the warmest welcome. She told herself, and she told Nora too, that she was too wise to believe the "flummery" with which she was regaled whenever she consorted with the outer world. Nevertheless she determined to mix a little, and very guardedly, with society.

Now, there were two of Sarah's friends living at Arleston, the fashionable suburb of Bradfield—the "West-end," where the *élite* generally congregated. The family of the Grices and the Lanes had been intimate for more than fifty years; old Lane and old Grice had been kindred spirits, and there had been as much friendship between them as the surliness of their natures permitted. They often snarled at each other, but they never actually quarrelled; and Mrs. Lane and Mrs. Grice were really friends, though they did not often meet. But they exchanged MS. sermons, of which Mrs. Grice had an immense stock, inherited from her grandfather, who was a famous Nonconformist divine; and they read together—that is, they read at the same time, though separately—such books as "Alleine's Alarm to the Unconverted," "Baxter's Saints' Rest," "Erskine's Gospel Sonnets," and "Boston's Fourfold State." Very good reading doubtless, if only it be not immoderately indulged in; but too much theology is as bad for the soul as too much romance is for the mind. One may even kill one's self on wholesome beef and mutton.

Mrs. Lane and Mrs. Grice were gathered to their fathers within a few months of each other, and Sarah became mistress of Salamanca House, and Martha and Mary of the house in St. Oswald's Square, where they had lived ever since they could remember. But Martha and Mary were both many years older than Sarah. Still the friendship founded by their parents was in some sort perpetuated by the daughters; old Lane sometimes condescended to tell Sarah she might ask those Grice girls to tea, and old Grice, a far more jovial fellow than old Lane, always gave

Sarah a hearty welcome, which he generally proved in the style condemned by Cowper, by administering hearty slaps or thumps upon her back; and sometimes by jokes of the broadest and most personal character.

In process of time old Grice also gave up the ghost, and his daughters, who had both lapsed into hopeless spinsterhood, were left, as people said, "very comfortably." That meant they had nearly £200 a year each, and a house full of good furniture, with plenty of plate and linen, and a good sum of ready money, wherewith to pay funeral and legal expenses. Mary was the elder by nearly seven years, and her health was far from good; the doctors said she had some inward complaint, and must, if she wished to avoid chronic invalidism, and, perhaps, fatal malady, leave the neighbourhood of St. Oswald's, the air of which did not suit her constitution. Martha was nothing loth; she was turned forty years of age, and she knew by heart every stick and stone in St. Oswald's Square; she was quite ready for a change. So they let their large house in the square, and it was forthwith turned into a manufactory, and shopping was built over the space they called by courtesy the garden. Steel toys, split key-rings, &c., henceforth flourished where the sickly rose-bushes and the sooty herbs and Michaelmas daisies had pined and withered for so many years. It was a comfort to think the poor things had ceased their annual abortive attempts at what botanists call *vernation* and *æstivation*, and were at last at rest.

The world was before the sisters, where to choose, and they chose not to leave Bradfield. They took a neat little house, in a nice little garden at Arleston, and they hired a nice tidy stirring servant maid, and they went every year for a month to Abergele or to Rhyl. Moreover, they "sat under" the Rev. Charles Pettifer, and were his staunch supporters and his professed admirers. Miss Lane and the Misses Grice had seen little of each other since the removal to Arleston. Sarah was occupied at home; her father during his last days grudged her even the innocent recreation of a country walk to Ashford, or an afternoon's shopping in Bradfield. For the last two years of his life she was not allowed to attend the evening service at St. Oswald's, and going to Arleston was, of course, quite out of the question. And the Grices rarely came back to their

old neighbourhood; being used to the cleanliness, and gentility, and comparatively clear atmosphere of Arleston. St. Oswald's seemed worse to them than it really was, and if Sarah now had them to tea it must be surreptitiously, and Snap had the evil habit of betraying such underhand proceedings to his master.

They wrote long pious letters to Sarah when the news of her "bereavement" reached them, and early in the spring they came to Salamanca House, to find both ladies from home. Later still, notes of courtesy were exchanged, and finally aunt and niece were invited to take tea on a certain afternoon at Woodbine Cottage, the retreat of the spinsters, where no woodbine had ever grown in the memory of man.

It was a beautiful afternoon when Sarah and Nora set off on this expedition. They walked through the dirty, noisy, smoky district about St. Oswald's, into the town, to the bottom of Cow Street, where they would find an Arleston omnibus. To take a cab or a fly would have been the simplest and pleasantest way of accomplishing the three or four miles that lay before them; but such an extravagance never even suggested itself to Sarah. It did not strike her that she had a right to a comfortable carriage of her own, that she might have her own brougham and barouche, and her own coachman and pair of horses, and not be charged with unreasonable expenditure. So the two ladies trudged through the sordid, ill-paved streets, keeping on the shady side of the way, for the sun was pouring down his post-meridian rays more fiercely than was quite comfortable. Nora was very glad when they gained the shelter of the omnibus; but as that delightful vehicle rolled and jolted along, it filled with dust and peppered the unlucky passengers till they were a spectacle to behold. Sarah was concerned for her crape and her new black silk, the most expensive dress she had ever owned. Nora was not a little cross; she did not like dust, and she said, "Such *maladresse!* to have so much dirty dust; in *my* country this might not be!"

"This is your country," said Sarah, severely, and Nora felt quite extinguished.

But they forgot their troubles when once they reached Woodbine Cottage. It was really a pretty little place;

there was not much traffic in the road or lane in which it stood, consequently not much dust; everything was wonderfully bright and clean, and marvellously cool. Both Sarah and Nora were in the mood to appreciate coolness just then. The sisters, on hospitable thoughts intent, had provided quite a sumptuous repast, and they all sat down contentedly to "high tea."

In spite of the dust and the heat, Nora enjoyed the cold tongue and the delicious bread and butter amazingly, and by the time Phillis, the maid, who was not so many years younger than her mistress, had carried out the tray, she had entirely recovered her wonted amiability, and was quite ready to be pleased with everything and everybody.

Of course, the three elder ladies had much to say to each other, and Nora sewed and listened. The story of the empty church was told all over again, and Maggie Aston came in for no small share of gravest reprimand. "But," said Mary Grice, at length, "you cannot profit under Dr. Bethell's ministry?"

Sarah shook her head mournfully. "No, no!" she said; "I like him better than I did. He means well, I dare say; but he is sadly in the dark, poor man; the god of this world has blinded his eyes."

"A blind leader of the blind!" remarked Mary.

"They will both fall into the ditch," responded Martha.

"My Sundays are no longer to me a day of blessing," added Sarah. "Dr. Bethell never preaches a sermon against which, on some point or other, I do not find myself bound to protest. I seldom hear his curates; but they follow in his track, and lack his ability, which I must confess is considerable."

"I think too much ability in a minister of the Gospel is a snare," said Mary Grice. "For my part, I like plain, practical sermons—the old thing over and over again. We cannot have too much of the truth; our hearts are naturally thorny ground, and so much of the good seed is continually being choked up and carried away by the fowls of worldliness and sin. Ah, Sarah, I wish you shared the precious, *precious* teaching we enjoy!"

"I wish I did," replied Sarah. "Ah, you are favoured;

you have a faithful ministry, which in these days of error is no small blessing. We live in fearful times."

"Fearful times, indeed!" responded Martha; "a worldly, godless age. The ancient spirit of piety has almost disappeared; the form without the power of religion prevails throughout the country. Popery and infidelity are rampant; Sabbath-breaking and drunkenness increase; all that is evil flourishes; all that is good languishes and dies;" and then they set to work, and drew such a picture of English society as fairly frightened poor, puzzled Nora. "My dear France is not nearly so bad as they say," she thought; "why do not the French and Germans send missionaries to these wicked English? I had no idea that England was so very bad; perhaps when my papa lived here it was better. He used to say that England was the most godly of all the nations of the earth."

Miss Lane and her friends would have been much astonished if they had known what comparisons their words had caused to be instituted.

Having concluded this jeremiad, the subject of the attack on Salamanca House came uppermost. Every inquiry had been made at the time, and detectives had been set to work; but nothing had ever transpired which could lead to the identification of the marauders, though Kitty Carter's father had been arrested on suspicion. Nothing being proved against him, he was, of course, released; and, though the police were still supposed to have the matter in hand, it seemed probable that the whole affair would for ever remain a mystery.

"You are quite sure of that Rhoda?" asked Mary Grice.

"Quite!" said Sarah, unhesitatingly. "Rhoda can say very saucy things; but she is to be *trusted*. Sauciness is common to all young people in the present day, I think" —with a glance at Nora. "But even if she did gossip, or intend to betray us, she could not. Rhoda knew nothing about the strong box, which looked just like a common bed-side chair; she was never alone in the room for one moment. The silver was in my charge, and I am certain she had no idea there was any more in the house, over and above what was in daily use, and a few things of small value in the sitting-room cupboard."

"But there was a rumour in the neighbourhood that poor Mr. Lane kept vast hoards of money and valuables in the house?"

"There was; though I never knew it till the police were making inquiries. And there really was a large sum in my father's possession—a great deal more than he ought to have kept by him. If the thieves had not been interrupted, I suppose they would have had it. I expect they would have ransacked first the room, then the house, and they would soon have found means to silence me."

"And they really took nothing, except the box under the bed?"

"Literally nothing, save a solitary spoon, and poor father's watch. I suppose, when the alarm was given, they caught at the first thing that seemed portable. The box must have disappointed them, for it contained nothing but old papers and letters, that were of no use, as people say, to any one except the owner. There were copies of leases and deeds in it, I know; but Mr. Salisbury had the original documents, so no inconvenience was sustained. I could swear to the box if I ever saw it again; it was one in a thousand."

"No doubt it is destroyed, with all that it contained."

"I dare say it and its contents were burnt to ashes long before the daylight. I don't care about the box: it is neither here nor there, except as it might, if it still existed, prove a clue to the detection of the murderers; for such, in point of fact, they were. Oh, Mary! oh, Martha! it was horrible! The very sight of the sitting-room door closed made me sick and faint for days after. And even now—it is very silly of me, and Nora never heard me say it before—but I would not for anything go into that room—my poor father's room, alone at night: my nerves might play me tricks. It would all come over again, and I should see him, in fancy, senseless on the floor. I keep the door locked always, and once a week I go in and look round—in broad daylight, and that is all. It is shamefully dirty, and everything is covered with dust; but, somehow, I cannot have the place disturbed; I can't let the girls in to clean it, and I have not strength of mind to do it myself."

"Sarah," said Martha, with decision, "you ought

to leave that house; for every reason you ought to leave it!"

"Leave Salamanca House?" said Sarah, quickly.

And yet there was something in her look and tone which made all her auditors feel sure that the idea was not quite a fresh one.

"Yes," returned Martha. "Why not? What is there to keep you any longer at the end of the town? It cannot be good for your health, and it cannot be good for your niece's health. The whole place is changed, the quarter is now only fit for mechanics, to whom, indeed, it has been chiefly given up for the last ten years. Nearly all the respectable families have left, and those who remain are nothing to you, I fancy."

"Nothing; there are none whom I should care to leave behind me—none with whom I should choose to be on terms of intimacy."

"Come out to Arleston," said Mary, "and sit under our dear Mr. Pettifer; his sermons would be meat and drink to you, Sarah. And we know of a house that would just suit you."

"What sort of house?"

"Exactly the thing; not too small, not too large and grand for a Christian to live in. It is not ten minutes' walk from this; suppose we put on our bonnets and go and look at it? I know where the keys are. The evening is delightful, and it is getting quite cool."

Sarah acquiesced with wonderful alacrity. "It will do us no harm to look at the place," she said; "and a short walk will be pleasant. Come, Nora."

The Misses Grice had calculated the distance to a nicety, for in precisely ten minutes after leaving their garden-gate, they found themselves at the door of a modest mansion, yclept "The Woodlands." The said Woodlands consisting of a few limes and copper-beeches, a silver birch or two, a clump of mountain-ashes, and a good many laburnums, lilacs, and red horse-chestnuts. It was really a very good house, well built, nicely finished, and unusually convenient. The kitchens, especially, gave satisfaction; they were so tidily arranged and fitted-up, and in the front kitchen was a famous dresser, and in the back kitchen a stately sink; both of which could be

scrubbed and scoured incessantly, and would always furnish Sarah with a little innocent recreation, whenever she felt disposed to amuse herself with such elegant toys as scrubbing-brushes and scouring flannels.

"But the rent?" said Sarah.

"Only £150," said Martha and Mary, in chorus.

Miss Lane almost screamed. She thought she would not mind, in her improved circumstances, paying £40, or even £50 a-year for rent, for she had secretly resolved to leave Salamanca House, ever since the day of her father's funeral. But £150! "No, no!" she exclaimed impetuously; "are you mad, Mary and Martha? It would not be right to go to such an immense expense."

"Mary," said Martha, "I wish you would take Miss Nora to look at the greenhouse; I have a word to say to Sarah." When they were left alone, Martha continued—"Now, Sarah, don't be offended, if I speak plainly. It is reported that you are a great heiress, that you have almost a million of money."

"The report is false, I have not so much; but I am rich, I do not deny it. They tell me I have more than £20,000 a-year; and I suppose I have. Of course, this is in confidence; I should not say it to any one beside yourself, Martha. Nora has no idea of my income, or she would expect to live like a princess."

"What a very lovely girl she is; I don't know that I ever saw such a fresh, beautiful face; and her eyes are the colour of my purple pansies—you ought to give her advantages, Sarah. Now, you can't spend £500 a-year in that dreadful, dirty, low-lived Poplar Street, and what is the use of your saving up your money at the rate of over £19,000 a-year? Why is it not right to pay £150 for house-rent? It would not be right for us to pay £70; but what are a hundred and fifty pounds out of twenty thousand? People's expenditure should be regulated by their income, and yours is large enough to permit you to rent several handsome houses at once. You might have a house in London, and another at the seaside, or anywhere else in the country, besides this one, which is insignificant enough, considering your circumstances; and you might keep them all up comfortably, and give large sums in charity, and finish Nora's education, and

yet keep well within your annual twenty thousand pounds."

"I will think of it," said Sarah. Spend £20,000 a year she never could, and never would, she said to herself. The very idea was preposterous, and she *must* save! Saving was as essential to her happiness as eating and drinking was to her bodily well-being. If she had had but twenty pounds a year, she would have lived upon eighteen—perhaps upon fifteen pounds, and saved the residue. But having—how unnatural it seemed—more than twenty thousand—it was nearer twenty-five thousand, only Sarah did not choose to say so—she might spend—well, how much, annually? She could not determine, but at all events she might live at the rate of several thousands a year. "It did not become a Christian to live in great state and luxury," she affirmed—a very convenient and well-sounding axiom for her, whose instincts were naturally parsimonious. It is so nice, so very satisfactory, to father our vices upon Christianity, and re-christen them as virtues.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NORA'S ADVENTURE.

AFTER a great deal of discussion, and several journeys to Arleston, Sarah at last resolved to take the house. Then she discovered that it was to be sold, and she thought that it would not be a bad investment for several of the spare thousands she had already accumulated. She went to Mr. Salisbury, and set him to inquire about the title, and to ascertain the exact value of the property; and that gentleman was much struck with the shrewdness, sagacity,

and legal knowledge of his wealthy client. It was, he acknowledged, a very good investment; also, he urged, it was not in the fitness of things that she, one of the richest people in the county, should live in a mere hired house. His only objection to "The Woodlands" was, that it was not "enough of a place" for a woman of property. And he, as well as Martha Grice, counselled her to look out, or at least let him look out, for some estate in the country, which she could purchase, and so take rank among the landed gentry. Moreover, he urged that Nora should have a season or two in London, and that a town residence was absolutely necessary.

To all of which Sarah turned a deaf ear. "We will do one thing at a time," she said, drily. "Let us conclude our present negotiation, and rest assured, I shall not further increase my possessions this year."

So it came to pass that Sarah became the lawful owner of "The Woodlands," and she and Nora, with Mary and Martha as allies, set to work at once on the necessary preparations. Of course Sarah could not act as any one else in her place would have acted, as people with a tithe of her income do act, and not imprudently. Instead of choosing trustworthy tradesmen, giving them her orders, and turning them into the house to do their *possible*, she chose to superintend the "removing" personally. She had all the carpets made at home; she had a woman-upholsterer at work for weeks; and she measured the windows for blinds and curtains with her own hands. Doubtless she saved a few pounds—as many as thirty or forty pounds, she said, when all was over—by her thrift; but she tired herself dreadfully, and got into her "moods" continually, and led poor Nora such a life, that she heartily wished "The Woodlands" at the bottom of the sea. Rhoda impertinently remarked that moving house, and cleaning house, and piety, didn't seem to go well together. Ann informed her mother, who came to see her, that *she* believed her mistress was "*possessed*."

Nora was glad enough to exchange Salamanca House for "The Woodlands," where she could have flowers, and gather them without blackening her fingers, and where she could look at something besides grimy brick walls and sooty roofs. And doubtless *ma tante* would be more

amiable when once she was settled in her new abode, and all the toils and cares of "flitting" happily concluded. *But*—there was leaving the Bethells, whom she loved all the more heartily, poor girl, because her home affections, which were naturally strong and deep, found no ordinary channel. In those days it was impossible to love Sarah Lane with other love than that which is paid to all men, even to our enemies. Nora and Gertrude Bethell had become fast friends. "Fanny was very nice," Nora said, "but Gertie was her darling." As for Dr. and Mrs. Bethell, they were the best and dearest people in the world, and she would have risked martyrdom for their sakes. But Sarah did not quite like the intimacy; indeed, she very much disliked it; for not only did she disapprove of the Bethells' religion, politics, and views generally, but she was jealous of them. It did not please her that the love which Nora withheld from her should be lavished on "strangers," and Nora had to bear the brunt of many a lecture, and of many a stinging inuendo, on the score of "her foolish school-girl friendship."

And it was a great pain to her to leave St. Oswald's. Dr. Bethell's teaching had really been very useful to her, and some of her happiest hours were spent under the shadow of that miserable little steeple which she had once thought the most impertinent and ridiculous attempt at a spire that could be imagined. The stupid little thing was just as silly and ugly as ever; but, somehow, Nora had come to love it, and the sound of the wretched ting-ting of St. Oswald's, miscalled a bell, was as sweetest music in her ears. How strangely our appreciation of even inanimate objects changes, in proportion as they are associated with our hours of happiness.

Summer had deepened into autumn before "The Woodlands" was ready for the reception of its new inmates, and the days had grown perceptibly shorter. "*Ma tante*," said Nora, one evening, when she was going out on a little errand, "I will, with your permission, go farther along the Ashton road. I should like to see once more the great chestnuts, which, they do say, will be cut down this winter. Is it that you permit me to take my little walk?" And Sarah, being rather less cross than was her normal state at this time, graciously gave consent.

She was very busy with some chintz, and she wanted to be alone, that she might cut it to the best advantage; a few joins, which would never be noticed, would be a saving of at least three-quarters of a yard. And it was such a pleasure to Sarah to save anything, that the very prospect of being able to accomplish it soothed her feelings and conduced to amiability.

Nora did her errand, which was to call upon the dressmaker who lived some distance along the Ashton road, but at least a mile and a half from the village of Ashton itself. Ashton had once been a pretty, secluded hamlet, with its one rural street, and many deep shady lanes winding their way among the flowery meadows, and crossing and crossed by rippling streams, all branches of one meandering brook or rivulet, which in its turn was tributary to a real broad river, on which stand several midland towns. And it had its beautiful old church—said to be a thousand years old—and its ancient hall, where Queen Elizabeth had once been received in one of her many progresses, and its noble avenue of elms and chestnuts, and the country round was as pretty as flat country, not very finely wooded, could be.

It is not pretty now; it has grown into a suburb of Bradfield. Its park is cut up into roads, and building societies have done their best to perpetuate their fame, in rows of vulgar brick houses, and still more vulgar flaring red villas, with ambitious names. The railroad runs through the avenue, which has been cut down to the last tree; and noisy manufactories, and "works" of all sorts, flourish within sight and within sound of the grand old parish church.

The park was already cut up, and divided into "lots," and fields were being turned into streets, and hedges and ditches were giving way to brick walls, when Nora paid her visit to Ashton on that autumn evening. But there was still a certain amount of rurality that pleased her, and she walked as far as the church, through lanes which had once been lonely, but were so no longer. The churchyard gate was open, and she ventured in, for the place looked so solemnly peaceful and quiet. She might not stay long, for already the twilight was falling; so she walked quickly round the church to her favourite spot, where the ground

sloped considerably, and where something like a prospect could be obtained.

She stood leaning on the low wall which divided the churchyard from the water meadows below, thinking of the old days, in the dear old home in the sunny South, and wondering what her life would be like, severed from intercourse with the dear Bethells, when she became aware that some one was very near her. She turned half-round, and there, facing her, with his ragged elbows on an ancient mossy head-stone, stood a forbidding-looking man, staring at her in most unpleasant fashion. Nora was frightened, for the man's looks were not reassuring, and there was no one else within sight, nor as far as she knew within hearing. "*Ah! quel mauvais sujet!*" she whispered to herself, and, gathering up her parasol and her dress skirts, she prepared to beat a quick retreat. On the other side of the church she thought she would be safe, for at least she would be in view of several houses, and the road near the gate was well frequented.

"I say, stop a bit, young woman!" cried the man, as Nora almost leaped over two or three grassy mounds. In her alarm she forgot the reverence due to nameless graves. She stopped, her heart beating quickly, but she tried to show no fear, and she did not scream and run, as her aunt would certainly have done; she stood her ground bravely, and said out boldly, "Well! what do you want with me? I have no money."

"I am not a beggar," replied the man, "and I don't want to harm you, nor to fright you; I only want to know —be you old Lane's grand-darter?"

"I am. What of that?"

"Nothing particular! Only I wanted to know. You don't favour him, nor yet that old cat, his darter. And your name is Lionorar Lane?"

"What can that matter to you?"

"It do matter; but never you heed! You're a prutty cratur, that you are! I never seed a finer, 'andsomer wench—I beg pardon—I mean lass."

"If that is all you have to say, I will wish you good evening," returned Nora, with dignity; but in her confusion and alarm, for his compliments were not at all to her taste, she said it rapidly in French.

"Ah! I don't understand yer foreign lingo," he said, with a coarse laugh. "Well, good-night to you, and good luck, and a good husband before you're a year older! I'm your friend, remember; I shan't lose sight of yer; *I'm your friend!*"

"Thank you," raid Nora, a little loftily. "Good night," and she made for the public road with all possible dispatch. The man did not follow her, and she walked home very fast. She found her aunt in a very bad temper, for she had cut the chintz to waste, and Nora must go into the town the first thing next morning and buy two more yards at least. Nora did not communicate her adventure, "for," said she to herself, "if I tell her now, while she is so cross, she will scold me for staying out so late. I shall certainly have much blame, and perhaps she will forbid that I go out again alone. Since nothing happened, except that I had fear, I need not tell her at all! But it was very odd that that horrid-looking man should know my name! I do not want him for a friend, but he only said that for impudence; he is a veritable *mauvais sujet! J'en suis bien sur.*"

CHAPTER XXV.

ST. MILDRED'S.

At length Nora and her aunt found themselves thoroughly settled at "The Woodlands." Except that she now saw little of her cherished friends the Bethells, the change brought to Nora unalloyed satisfaction. Arleston had a certain suburban prettiness of its own; indeed, as compared with the eastern district of St. Oswald's, it might be called extremely pretty. What though the roads were

dusty and formal, there were many trees to overshadow, at least, a few inches of the pathway; and if there was more brick-and-mortar than one could wish, there were also large gardens, with here and there a paddock; and Elizabethan gables, and Tudor chimneys, and Swiss-timbered fronts, and Byzantine cupolas, though incongruous and absurd in most instances, were yet far better to look at than dingy, many-windowed factories and workshops, and countless lofty pillars, emitting ceaseless clouds and streams of black, sulphurous smoke. The tall chimneys of Bradfield were alike horrible to Nora and to the Bethells. Miss Lane could scarcely like them; but she regarded them with a certain amount of veneration, as being part and parcel and highly significant of the beloved town of her birth, much as a rustic admires the stocks and the pound of the village where he was born.

But in spite of every advantage, Sarah felt terribly like a fish out of water in her new and superior abode. She had lived all her life in Poplar Street, and, though only thirty-six years of age, she found it extremely difficult to set out anew, with nearly every circumstance of her being altered—or, as she phrased it, transmogrified. Mentally considered, Sarah was turning into a fossil-woman, when Providence kindly interfered in her behalf, and by the removal of the stern old despot whom she called father, raised her to the dignity, and invested her with the prerogatives and responsibilities, of an independent human creature. She actually missed the sprawling red roses and nondescript foliage on the walls, and the uneven ceiling of her old composite kitchen parlour. She missed the brick-paved yard, the ramshackle kitchen, the consumptive poplars, the rippling gutter, and even the incapacitated pump, and the bulging water-butt. She spoke tenderly of the break-neck cellar steps of Salamanca House, and sentimentally she mused on certain uncouth closets and cupboards, which were inconveniently absent at "The Woodlands."

But for the first few weeks her great trouble was the church of St. Mildred's, which she now attended, and which was as unlike St. Oswald's as it well could be. The new sanctuary which had arisen on the ashes of the old Episcopal chapel—some of its attendants called it "Eppis-

Kopple"—was built in the most modern style, and with all the most recent improvements.

Sarah did not like it. She hated the open pews, in which she could be stared at; she scorned the unpretending stained deal, which of late years has superseded the solid oak, and the substantial, solemn-hued mahogany. She turned up her nose literally and metaphorically at the Low Church Gothic, which Nora said was neither one thing nor another. It must be confessed that this mild, compromising style of ecclesiastical architecture is exasperating, for it has all the faults and none of the grandeur and glory of the true pure style; and to any one whose soul delights in the beauties of the severest Hanoverian period, this frivolous, go-between, miscalled Gothic, is simply detestable, and calculated to ruffle the spirit of the devoutest worshipper.

But the Reverend Charles Pettifer was decidedly a success!—as the Misses Grice said, "he was a boon and a blessing!" That is to say, he was considered in this light by a limited—a *very* limited—portion of the community, who said their prayers dominically "according to the usage," or one of the usages, of the Anglican Church as by Act of Parliament established. The congregation of St. Mildred's was a peculiar one, and it rather prided itself on its various peculiarities. It was, of course, composed like all other congregations—conforming or non-conforming—of men, women, and children; but the men were glaringly in the minority. Here and there sat a stolid, prosy paterfamilias, or a staid elderly bachelor; but women were the preponderating element, and austere spinsters and ancient virgins prevailed. There were not many children, and only a few growing-up young people, and the church was never at any time so crowded that a late comer could not take his choice of seats. Nora observed on the first Sunday of their attendance at St. Mildred's that the congregation was scanty, and Martha Grice, who happened to be present when the remark was made, replied—"Ah! my dear, there are few who can appreciate our beloved minister; only those who have the root of the matter in them can fully comprehend and enjoy the precious, *precious* teaching with which we are blessed! A man who preaches the Gospel—the pure

Gospel—is sure to be unpopular, for the carnal mind is enmity against God."

Both the Misses Grice had a habit of interweaving into their discourse texts, which were supposed to illustrate their meaning and to clench their assertions. Some of their friends believed them to be very pious women in consequence, but not a few people objected to this style of conversation as irrelevant and profane. Nora was not as yet sufficiently experienced in the Scriptures to be able to detect the lapses and fallacies of these good ladies; but she did wonder if all the people in Arleston who disapproved of Mr. Pettifer were at enmity with God, and she would have liked to asked whether Mr. Pettifer were one of God's especial favourites, and also whether the "pure Gospel," with which he was accredited, was committed to him alone of all the clergy of Bradfield. But Nora had learned many a wholesome lesson since first she set her foot on British soil, and foremost among them was the expediency of restraining her tongue. So now she listened and held her peace, like the good little girls who are made to be seen and not to be heard.

"I am sure you have enjoyed the services of this hallowed day, Sarah," said Mary Grice; "it must be a blessed change for you after all the trials of the last few months. Where you had rams' horns, you have now silver trumpets; where once you had coarse barley loaves, unleavened and adulterated, you have the best and finest of the wheat."

"Yes," replied Sarah, "I like your pastor. I have not heard such a faithful sermon for years; it was a *searching* sermon, and at the same time a comforting sermon; it reminded me of dear Mr. Bunn's spiritual discourses. But I do not like your church."

"Why not? But please say *our* church, and *our* pastor, Sarah; for you are one of ourselves now; you, too, sit under our excellent Mr. Pettifer."

"I don't like those open seats in the face of all the congregation. I like to be well shut in; and the place is too light, it looks quite frivolous. And I never saw an organ in such a situation before. Organs were made for galleries, and galleries for organs; why anybody should put them into side aisles, blocking up the space where there might be pews, I cannot fancy. But I suppose it is

one of the new-fangled notions of this preposterous nineteenth century."

"The organ is very badly played, I think," ventured Nora, whose ears had been excruciated all day; for the singing was "of a severe and protracted character," and the sermons, both morning and evening, being of a decidedly penitential tone, the hymns and tunes had been to match. Both were gloomy, and the longest of long metres were evidently the order of the day.

"Our organ is not played scientifically, if that is what you mean," replied Martha, severely; "but we aim at a simple worship, and we strongly object to all those innovations which tend to Ritualism and Popery, and which stamp the mark of the Beast on those who practise them Mr. Pettifer strongly objects to any mere musical display; you will find the services of St. Mildred's purely Christian, and uncompromisingly Protestant."

"But they need not sing so slowly, need they?" said Nora.

"Fast singing is fashionable, I am told," answered Martha; "but it is irreverent and unseemly, and there ought to be no fashions regarded in the worship of God. My dear Miss Nora, I am afraid you heard with the outward ears only."

"Ah!" interposed Sarah, shaking her head ominously, and sighing like a seal in its last agonies—"I am afraid Nora hears only with the outward ears; there is no response in her heart. I trust the sound teaching she will now receive may awaken her from the deep sleep of trespasses and sins, and rouse her to a sense of her own worthlessness and depravity."

"Ah, yes, my dear, your own innate depravity!" said Mary Grice, looking encouragingly at the young sinner, of whom she had heard most unsatisfactory accounts. "You know you are a poor, lost creature, sunk in the mire of evil. There is no good thing in you; even your best deeds are provoking to God, and you are under His wrath and condemnation."

"I am not so sure of that," said Nora to herself; but she made no rejoinder. Only she hoped devoutly that Mr. Pettifer was not to be let loose upon her, as Mary and Martha seemed to anticipate. They evidently expected

him to set to work at once, in order to effect Nora's conversion; it never occurred to them that she might perchance be converted already. And they were quite willing to aid their minister and their friend in their efforts for Nora's welfare, to the best of their ability. From what she could gather, as she listened to the conversation between these ladies and her aunt, Nora was afraid that she was going to have a dismal time of it; "For," she said to herself, "converted, as they mean it, I never can be; and if that man Pettifer comes to talk to me privately, I am afraid I shall be naughty."

Several weeks went by, and Sarah liked Mr. Pettifer's preaching more and more; but she could not be reconciled to the frivolous modern air of the building. She literally pined after the sombre aspect of St. Oswald's, and yearned in vain for the horse-box pew in which she had sat contentedly, or discontentedly, for so many years. But the exchange, as regarded the pulpit, was worth any sacrifice; and she only marvelled how she could have put up with Dr. Bethell's heresies and heterodoxies so long.

Nora, to her own infinite relief, was absent when Mr. Pettifer paid his first pastoral visit; but Miss Lane repeated, as far as she could, the subject matter of the private discourse with which he had favoured her. It seemed to Nora's perverted mind that it was singularly stupid; but perhaps it was not improved by repetition. It was pretty clear that her own "case," as the spinsters called it, had been most freely discussed, and that she had been called a lost sheep, a stray lamb, an unregenerate soul, a child of wrath and of perdition, and that her conversion was decided upon, and was to be brought about immediately.

I am sorry to say Nora was in the habit of taking antipathies; and very strong antipathies they were. She took a violent antipathy to Mr. Pettifer the first time she ever looked in his face, and that was on their first Sunday at St. Mildred's, and he was in the reading-desk. And when her aunt asked her what she thought of their new minister, she replied, with all the natural impudence of her seventeen years, "I like him not at all; I am sure he is not a gentleman, and I think he knows not much."

"Nora!" said Miss Lane, severely, "how do you dare

speak thus of the pastor whom God has set over you? Speaking evil of dignities is forbidden in the Bible, you know."

"Is it? But, *ma tante*, I did not know that the Pettifer was a dignity. He does not look like one: truly, he seems to me a sneak!"

"A *what*, Nora?"

"A sneak, *ma tante!*"

"Nora, you deserve to be punished. If you were a few years younger, I should whip you and send you to bed. But if I do not punish you, God will. He will not permit you to speak thus with impunity of His honoured servants. This is the evil fruit of Dr. Bethell's influence; I am glad you are separated from that family."

"*Ma tante*," replied Nora, with grave decision, "I may as well tell you one thing. I will obey you as far as I can. But to give up my beloved friends at St. Oswald's Rectory is what I *cannot* do; no, in truth, I cannot!"

"You mean you will not?"

"Yes, perhaps I do. No, I certainly will not!"

"And that is what Dr. Bethell teaches you, I suppose? Great good he has done you, that you boldly set yourself against your elders, and against the person who stands to you in the place of your parents. But we shall see, Nora; we shall see. I shall advise with Mr. Pettifer."

"Then, *ma tante*, if you do that, it will be very bad for us both. I do try to be good; I try to please you; I wish to obey you and to treat you with reverence; for, though you do not quite understand me, I think you mean to be kind to me. You say the *jeunes personnes*—that is, the young people—should be in subjection. Well, in nearly everything I will be in subjection to *you;* but to that Pettifer—no; not one bit, not one minute, I tell you. I like him not at all—I do despise him!"

Now Nora frequently used words without knowing their full import; as, when she called Mr. Pettifer "a sneak," a term which she had caught from Rhoda, she meant simply to say that he was a very common-place, undignified-looking person, and that he pretended to a vast deal to which he had no claim. And she was right; for Mr. Pettifer was singularly ignorant and conceited. Like other little-minded, shallow-pated men, lay or clerical, he had

an immense opinion of his own importance. He magnified his office with a vengeance. He wanted to be a pope, for he loved power, and he yearned for the popularity which never came; but in order to be a Protestant pope —there are a good many in all the churches of Christendom—a man must have forces in himself; he must have judgment, tact, large patience—he must know how to restrain his speech. In all and each of these essentials, the would-be pope of St. Mildred's was entirely lacking. Above all, a Protestant pope must not be a weak man; all the talent and genius in the world will not serve him, if it must work on the delusive sub-strata of weakness and self-complacency. And Charles Pettifer was pitifully weak, most miserably self-centred. How he had ever become an ordained minister of the Established Church was a marvel to many—to nearly all who knew him intimately. His attainments were of the crudest, and he despised and contemned the learning and the honours of the universities. Oxford, in his estimation, was a snare and a pitfall, Cambridge a delusion and a folly. As for London University, he believed that it rejoiced in an invisible Principal, or Chancellor, whom, for propriety's sake, we will call—*Mephistopheles*. That

"A little learning is a dangerous thing"

was strikingly exemplified in the career of Charles Pettifer. He taught, and he believed, that the extreme of danger lay in much learning. Whether the "Pierian springs" of St. Bees are in themselves shallow and brackish, I cannot say—for of St Bees and its professors I know literally nothing—or whether the student Charles Pettifer only tasted of its classic waters, and took but hasty sips of its fountains of erudition, I cannot tell; but certainly what he did imbibe at that Cumbrian seat of learning tended to intoxicate his weak brain and to inflate his narrow soul with pride and self-glorification. It would have been better for him if he had learned a little more, or if he had remained in his original obscurity. Either alternative was preferable to his present state of self-satisfied complacency and absurd assumption of prerogatives to which he had mere nominal pretensions.

Why, being originally a Dissenter, he did not embrace

the tip-top pinnacle of extreme High Churchism, might be worthy of metaphys ical and psychological inquiry; for, as a rule, the most intolerant, bigoted, fanatic Ritualists are made out of 'verted Nonconformists; just as the bitterest, narrowest, most irrational Dissenters spring from the bosom of an uncompromising Episcopacy. But, with all his heart, he despised Dissent and Dissenters, especially Methodists, with whom, in his boyhood's days, he had been principally associated. He was now a clergyman of the Church of England, and on that rock he vaunted himself. But if the Church of England had no better representative than the Rev. Charles Pettifer—*minus* any degree—we should not have now before us, looming like a retributive ghost, the dire question of disestablishment. That dear old lady, yclept "Mother Church," would have been pensioned off long years ago, and relegated to an honourable but compulsory retirement. Happily for Mother Church's temporal prosperity, her sons of the Pettifer species are not numerous. They are to be found, too, in other communions than hers, and they ought to be classed as psychological studies, and catalogued with other natural curiosities.

Mr. Pettifer was a married man. He was, at the time the Lanes settled at Arleston, about forty years of age. His wife, Ruth Pettifer, was near upon fifty, and looked considerably older. Charles was not really bad looking, though his weak simper and his self-confident mien spoilt him. As a journeyman carpenter, or a country draper's assistant, he might, among his compeers, have been considered handsome, and on Sundays and holidays, duly got up, he might have passed for that nondescript creature, a "gent"—for a gentleman, *never!*

Ruth was decidedly plain, faded, and prematurely aged. She looked worn, weary, quenched, as indeed she was. A systematic course of snubbing, scrupulously administered year after year, tends greatly to the diminishing of all personal charms and graces. Charles was generally spruce and well attired; Ruth was invariably shabby and ill dressed. Charles was proud, arrogant, self-asserting; Ruth was humble, meek, and diffident. He was king, autocrat, and czar; she was neither queen-consort nor czarina, except by courtesy. He was imperious—she was

meek. He was a mentally-constituted *pachyderm;* she was painfully sensitive, and quivered and shrank under a pin's prick, while he scarcely felt a sword's thrust, or a cudgel. He was very ill-tempered, being both hasty and sullen; she was gentle, much enduring, rarely roused to anger, unless he were touched, and then her indignation knew no bounds; for, strange to say, she believed in him, and loved him with all the strength and fidelity of her woman's nature. She was not worthy of him, she told herself very often, when his indifference, or, worse still, his openly-expressed contempt, stung her to the quick. He ought to have married a younger, handsomer, cleverer woman—one who could have entered into his high aspirings, and worked with him, she said once, and only once, when, weakened by bodily suffering, and tortured with the sense of unrequited affection, she made a sort of half-confidence to the only friend she had.

He had never loved her, but she had loved him,—how or why, was one of those inscrutable mysteries which will never be solved while time shall last. He had married her because she had a little money, which enabled him to scramble through St. Bees College, and the residue of which eked out their slender resources in the days of his curacy and chaplaincy. He felt that he had "thrown himself away," and now and then, when he was more than ordinarily displeased, he did not scruple to say so. Those of his congregation whom he had outraged—and he was given to outraging people under the protection of the cloth, and that magic prefix of Rev. — declared that Mrs. Pettifer was "cruelly ill-treated." This, as the world holds ill-treatment, was altogether untrue. He never struck her; he never called her bad names; "a fool" was the worst epithet he bestowed upon her, and she had got used to that, and honestly believed that she fully deserved to be so stigmatised, and that he had a right to call her what he pleased. Neither did he ever grudge her wholesome food; she had her place always at bed and board; and he doled out to her such dribblets of money as he told himself he could spare, and such as she could be trusted to expend. Who, then, should presume to slander the Rev. Charles by asserting that his wife, as his wife, had not at all a blissful time of it?

Of course if you vote him to be a good husband, you must not take into account sharp words, severe reproofs, savage taunts, sneers, covert sarcasms, rebuffs, contradictions, coldness, neglect, and a thousand little acts which foolish people call unkindness. If you do, I am afraid the roll of good husbands will be shortened sensibly. But I have no hesitation in saying that Mrs. Pettifer was a good wife, though she was very far from clever, and in some senses weak-minded; but she loved her husband devotedly, stedfastly, through long years of icy indifference and supercilious neglect. She believed in him, she trusted him; she never reproached him, she never dreamed that his estimation of her character was false and unjust. When he was cross she pleaded in excuse her own defects; when he was what some women would have called "brutal," she said it was all her own stupidity; when he laughed at her, she reflected that she was no companion for him, and that it was a sad drawback to him, as a clergyman, to be burdened with such a poor, foolish, inefficient wife. She did her best in all things; she was almost morbidly conscientious, and she strove her hardest to make the home comfortable for him. As for herself, it did not matter whether she were comfortable or not. She would have fed him with ortolans and peaches, if she could have got them, while she said grace over a dry crust and apple-parings; she would have poured out chalices of sparkling wine for him, while she drank only water from the brook. I really believe that if she could have done it, legally and without sin, she would have divorced herself, that he might take to himself such a wife as he deserved. If ever the legend of Griselda was wrought into actual every-day life, it was in her experience,—for her patience, her meek endurance, her entire self-abnegation, were incredible to those who did not witness them, and puzzled and astonished those who did.

She did not call upon Miss Lane, when first she became a sheep of St. Mildred's fold, for the simple reason that she could not. She had never had strong health; her frequent petty ailments, her frail appearance, her nervous attacks had long been quoted against her, as a proof of her ineligibility as a pastor's wife. She took it all patiently, poor meek soul! She had learned perfectly to

endure and to be silent. When she was languid she struggled against what she supposed to be constitutional indolence. When strange oppression seized her, and sudden faintness overpowered her, she accounted for it by saying that she was always easily tired, and inclined to foolish vapourish feelings, and when her nights became restless and sleepless, and her appetite, which had always been slender, failed entirely, she pitifully begged her husband to have patience with her; "it was only indigestion, and her heart would beat so; she would soon be well again."

And Charles recommended camomile tea and long walks as far into the country as she could get. The camomile tea she took dutifully, though it made her very sick, and did not diminish any of the symptoms of her curious, nameless malady; but the walks into the country were never taken, for even a promenade in the garden was too much for the invalid's exhausted frame, and brought on frightful attacks of palpitation.

"Mere nervousness and derangement of the digestive organs," said the Rev. Charles, when any one urged upon him the expediency of calling in medical assistance. "She was always slightly bilious and very nervous; I should not be much surprised, though, if it ended in jaundice."

To do the man justice, he never dreamed how it was ending, or how speedily the ending was to be; and in his ineffable complacency of self-love, it never occurred to him that poor Ruth really suffered, though it did strike him that she was preposterously weak.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"SO TIRED."

As Mrs. Pettifer could not call upon Miss Lane, of "The Woodlands," it naturally came to pass that Miss Lane, at the instance of her pastor, reversed the order of things, and called on Mrs. Pettifer, of No. 10, Bellevue. Nora accompanied her, and was greatly pleased with the gentle, uncomplaining invalid.

Miss Lane had been told that her pastor's wife was sadly deficient in energy, and that she might get well again fast enough, if she only chose to make an effort. But Sarah was not without discrimination, and she could be just enough where her own interests were not immediately concerned, and she decided, before she had been five minutes in Mrs. Pettifer's company, that the poor lady was past making an effort, and that the "end of it" would not be jaundice, but something infinitely more fatal. And Sarah felt very sorry for poor, worn-out, fading Ruth, the more especially as Martha and Mary had confided to her the fact of Mrs. Pettifer's "spiritual lethargy and darkness." Here was a woman with the shadow of the grave upon her, and, in all probability, little prepared for the awful change awaiting her; it behoved Sarah to speak faithfully.

The difficulty was how to introduce the topic adroitly, for even Sarah Lane felt some compunction at the idea of distressing a dying person, and such she saw very clearly that Ruth was. But Ruth herself soon broached the matter. After talking over the advantages of "The Woodlands" as a residence, and expressing her pleasure at her visitor's appreciation of her husband's ministry, she spoke of her own house as being damp, and badly situated as to aspect. "But it suited us," she said, in explanation; "and when we wanted a house this was the only one to be

House-rent is so very high at
we were obliged to pitch our
"
change," urged Sarah, "if
as I am pretty sure it is.
it is not so dry as it ought
The Woodlands' attended
in this road was most
people generally enjoy as
more favoured dis-
matter. As for my dear
am thankful to say."
was in excellent health;
seek some other resi-
to be let in Chandos
the drains in perfect
is killing you."
is not Bellevue," re-
in her dull eyes.
actually to please her.
Ruth, as quietly as
worn out. "Nothing
now and I should not
suggesting any change. Whether
here when I am gone, I cannot
what is left to me on earth, I
undisturbed.
The very thought of
and here was
not at all clear, and
unsound, calmly
In fact, she spoke
pleasant journey into a far
recovery is impossible?"
tness that Ruth almost
steady answer. "One
death is slowly but
stand in the shadow of
There is wonderful

truth in the words of the old ballad—a vain, worldly ballad though it is, as Charles tells me—the words—

"'I see a hand you cannot see,
Which beckons me away;
I hear a voice you cannot hear,
Which says I must not stay.'"

"Is not that fanciful?"

"I think not, though Charles told me I had better have verses of hymns and Scripture in my mind, than foolish profane songs. But one does see clearly when the end is *very* near! I do not feel as if I were going out of the world, but that the world is fading from me, and every day my God is nearer to me; and, though I cannot yet see His face, I can feel His kind hand clasping mine, and I am not afraid. Yes, He is calling me, and I am going to Him!"

"But," said Sarah, bewildered, "Mr. Pettifer said you were very unwell; he never hinted that anything serious was the matter. I was quite unprepared to find you—so—in these circumstances."

"Mr. Pettifer does not realise how ill I really am. All my worst attacks have been in his absence; and I do not see why he should be distressed before the worst comes. I always get up a little cheerfulness when he comes in."

"But is that right? Is it not a kind of deceit? Now, I do not believe in 'pious frauds.'"

"Nor I either. But I do not think I am wrong in saving my husband from needless anxiety. Nothing that he can do will make any difference now; all the physicians in Christendom could not cure me, or extend my little span of earthly life. And it is no effort to be cheerful; no mere pretence, I mean. I am as happy as a child going to sleep in its mother's arms. Please, Miss Lane, do not say anything to Mr. Pettifer. It could do no good, and it would greatly distress me. The only thing that could distress me now would be to see my dear husband anxious and harassed on my account."

"But will not the shock be all the greater when it comes?"

"Perhaps, for a little time. But Charles is so good, and he will have strength given him, and he will know

that it is far better for me. Oh, it is all right! It is wonderful how smooth and easy God makes everything, and how gently He loosens the ties that bind one to the earth."

"You speak of God, but is not your trust in Christ?"

"Christ *is* God. I never could understand those metaphysical distinctions of divinity. I am not a person of much intellect. I cannot comprehend the plan of redemption, as people call it, so plainly as I ought; but I believe that God and Christ are one; that in the Son dwells all the glory and fulness of the Father, of whom He is the express image. I cannot separate them, as some do. It may be that I am in error. I never could explain and define doctrines, and what Charles assures me are the necessary dogmas of our faith. He has a mind of immense grasp, as you must have discovered for yourself, and my mind is like a child's—it can lay hold of nothing but Christ, God in Christ, and faith, and trust, and perfect rest in Him. And soon I shall know all about it. I want to be on the other side; I want to know; I want to know so much that is hidden from me now."

And again came that strange light into the dim eyes, and something like a glow stole over the ashen grey features. Nora was greatly awed, and even Sarah could not bring herself to warn the dying woman against self-deceptions, and delusions of the enemy of souls, as was her invariable practice when any one spoke confidently of the world to come. Death was in Ruth's face—it wore that ashen grey tint which belongs not to warm human life, even in its strongest pangs and its greatest weakness. And the features were painfully sharpened and the frame attenuated. Ruth knew that she was dying, and her soul was at peace—nay, it was filled with the peace which passeth understanding; and the dark valley was to her "a lighted way."

That very evening Sarah and Nora saw Mr. Pettifer after the service—for there was service at St. Mildred's every Thursday night at seven o'clock. Mr. Pettifer was extremely deferential to his wealthy parishioners, and he generally escorted the ladies to their home, and not unfrequently went in with them, and accepted Miss Lane's invitation to "take a bit of supper with them." It was, of course, mentioned that they had visited Mrs. Pettifer

that morning, and Mr. Pettifer said, "Yes, Ruth had told him of the call, and he was greatly obliged to them, for she wanted rousing; she lay upon the sofa dreaming, and fancying she could not take the air, till she believed herself to be seriously ill."

Sarah was mindful of Mrs. Pettifer's injunction, so she betrayed no confidence, but she saw no harm in replying, "And I think she *is* seriously ill, Mr. Pettifer! I should say, from my own observation, that her state is alarming. She ought to have the best advice immediately."

"She will not. I have pressed her to see Mr. Lambert, who prescribed for me when I was out of health three or four years ago. He knows something of her constitution, and I have no doubt he would set her up in no time; but she is perverse. Yes, I must call her *perverse*. She always was singularly obstinate."

A greater libel on poor, meek, submissive Ruth could scarcely have been uttered, though Mr. Pettifer, at the moment at least, gave himself credit for speaking nothing but the truth.

Sarah answered, "Perverse or not, she ought to be in the doctor's hands, if it were only for your own satisfaction. There is deadly mischief at work, or I am greatly mistaken."

Mr. Pettifer laughed.

"My dear Miss Lane, you don't know my wife; she really does 'enjoy bad health,' paradoxical as it may sound. We have been married nearly seventeen years—and I knew her long before we thought of becoming man and wife—and I assure you I never remember any time when she did not, now and again, make *post-mortem* arrangements. She will outlive me after all, I dare say. A creaky gate hangs longest—you know the proverb?"

"She will not live out the week!" exclaimed Nora, who would have liked nothing better than to be allowed to tell Mr. Pettifer exactly what she thought of him. I am afraid the opinions she burned to express were far from complimentary, for she thought to herself, "If I were his wife I am sure I should be very glad to die; it must weary one of life to live in the same house with him."

Again Mr. Pettifer laughed, and his laugh was not a pleasant one, for it was partly forced and wholly derisive.

"My wife is not thinking of making her last dying speech and confession just yet, I assure you, Miss Nora. I doubt if I shall ever be left to play the part of disconsolate widower. In two or three weeks Mrs. Pettifer will be going about as usual. Still I think I shall take your advice, Miss Lane; I am going into the town to-morrow, and I will call round on Lambert and describe her symptoms, and request him to see her as early as possible. I have no doubt in my own mind that she has a touch of the jaundice!"

"And jaundice requires proper medical treatment. But, Mr. Pettifer, it is not jaundice that ails your wife—I am very much afraid it is heart disease."

"Oh, no! no! nothing of the kind. Though, as a rule, heart disease is a bugbear, and nothing more. I have known dozens of people, said to be suffering from the malady in their youth and middle age, live on to be quite venerable. Dear me! now I think of it, my own mother had heart disease, and she died, not long ago, of a bad leg at seventy-seven."

"There are various kinds of heart disease, Mr. Pettifer. Heart disease may be functional or organic; if the latter, it is sure to kill pretty quickly. It is the grey tint of the face that frightens me, and the extreme attenuation: I have seen the same thing before."

"Ruth always had a queer, leaden sort of complexion; when she is ill she turns of a greenish grey, just as you would turn pale or sallow through sickness. Even in her first youth she never boasted of any of those fresh tints which are so lovely in budding womanhood." And he glanced meaningly at Nora, who blushed furiously, and felt vixenish.

"When you have known Mrs. Pettifer a few years, my dear ladies, you will become accustomed to her unhealthy looks," concluded Mr. Pettifer; "and in the mean time I thank you sincerely for your kind sympathy and concern. I hope you will very often look in upon us, the oftener the better."

And when Mr. Pettifer had eaten a morsel more cheese, and drank another glass of Sarah's excellent sherry, he said grace unctuously, and took his departure.

"I am glad he is going to have a doctor to her," said

Miss Lane thoughtfully, when she and Nora were left alone. "That cannot be her natural complexion, and I know that ashy hue always accompanies a peculiar and rapidly fatal form of heart disease."

"Horrid man!" cried Nora wrathfully. "That laugh of his is worse than his smile, and both are intolerable. How I do hate him!"

"Be silent, Nora!" said Miss Lane. "Mr. Pettifer is not a Frenchman, and he is not frivolous, like your favourite Dr. Bethell, and so you do not like him. But he is one of the best of men, and though I am very sorry for his wife, I believe she tries him greatly. It is a strange thing that talented men and devout men nearly always make mistakes in choosing a partner for life."

"I am sure if ever there was a saint," began Nora, impetuously, taking up the cudgels for Mrs. Pettifer. But her aunt repressed her at once. "Hold your tongue, Nora! You have already spoken improperly, and I see you are in a very sinful frame of mind to-night; you *look* saucy! No! not another word; but take your candle and go to bed; it is later than usual for you."

But next day Mr. Pettifer did not go into the town; it rained, and he was very busy finishing up his Sunday evening's discourse on the opening of the Seventh Seal. On Saturday morning he went to the clerical breakfast, and when it was over, he sought out Mr. Lambert, and asked him to look in when he was going his Arleston round on Monday, for Mrs. Pettifer wanted a little physicking. "She's just out of sorts," he said in explanation; "bilious, I fancy, for she eats nothing; very much as she has often been before, but worse, and less inclined than ever to make an effort. She might rally, if she would, I am convinced. But she won't take needful food or exercise; she does nothing, absolutely nothing, but lie on the sofa and doze. It's nothing of any consequence; still, I should feel more comfortable if you saw her and prescribed for her."

"Certainly; has she taken anything?"

"Camomile-tea. I always find great benefit from camomile-tea myself."

"Then you must have a horse's stomach and the liver of a hippopotamus! Camomile is a valuable drug, there

is no doubt about it; but dirty water is quite another thing."

"I thought she wanted a tonic."

"And I should say, it is not a tonic she wants, and if it were, camomile tea would not suit her—she is too delicate. I wish I could see Mrs. Pettifer to-day, but I am summoned to an important consultation at Clay-hill, and I have several critical cases on hand. Still, I could manage to run up to Arleston again to-night, though it would be very late."

"On no account. Monday will do quite as well."

"I shall certainly see Mrs. Pettifer to-morrow. I must be in Willow-lane—not a hundred yards from your door."

"Pray do not! I should feel most averse to encroaching on your time upon the Sabbath-day."

"Ah! I know your sentiments, but I am no Sabbatarian. I believe in Sunday, the Lord's-day, but I am no Jew; and even the Jews, you know, pulled their asses and their oxen out of the pit on the seventh day of the week. So I am not afraid to exercise my gifts of healing on the first day."

"But it is inconsistent that in a case which is not extreme, but trifling, a doctor should be seen to visit at *my* house."

"Confound the sanctimonious prig!" was the unuttered thought of the doctor; but he only said stiffly, "For once, then, you must be content to appear inconsistent. If Mrs. Pettifer is to be my patient at all, I must see her to-morrow! I never lose time, even in "*trifling*" cases; and let me tell you, Mr. Pettifer, that friends and relations are frequently the worst judges as to what is trifling and what is serious."

That night Mr. Pettifer told his wife that Mr. Lambert would pay her a visit next morning. "And you had better stay in bed," he added gruffly, "for he'll want to stethoscope you, or some such nonsense. Doctors must make a case of it."

For a minute or two Mrs. Pettifer replied nothing. At last she said, "I am glad, Charles; for though he can do nothing for me, it will be a comfort to you afterwards that you did all you could."

"Do nothing for you? A comfort to me afterwards!

What do you mean, Ruth? You are most absurd and most provoking! Now, you know, I never can stand nonsense! and if there is one thing more than another that puts me out of temper, it is *that!*"

"Dear ——, I am not talking nonsense."

"Do you mean to lie there—and it's all your own fault that this bilious attack, or whatever it is, has settled upon you—and tell me to my face that you are dying?"

"Yes. I did not mean to tell you at all; but I was not sure that it would be right to let it go on to the very last."

"Go on to the very last! Upon my word, Ruth, you are enough to provoke a saint. If *I* were a man of the world I should swear at you—as it is I could use very strong language, only grace restrains me."

"Charles, my dear, do have a little patience with me! Be kind to me now, and you will be glad afterwards."

"I am always kind to you."

"I know you are, dear—far kinder than I deserve; for I am sensible that I have not been a good wife to you. I have tried, indeed I have; and if you had ever encouraged me only a little, I think I might have done rather better. Though I never was the right woman for you—I ought never to have married you; it was a shame that you should be tied to such a poor, weak, washed-out creature, so many years older than yourself! My only excuse is that I loved you dearly—*dearly*—and life seemed so hard, such a blank, without you; and when you asked me to be your wife the temptation was too great, and I yielded. I know I ought to have refused you, for your own sake. I have felt how wrong I was many and many a time. But you forgive me now, don't you, love?"

The tone of her voice was inexpressibly soft and tender when she called him "*love!*" That one word spoke volumes; the hidden passion of years seemed concentrated into that moment. They had been to each other only "Charles" and "Ruth" for so long. There had been a time when he used terms of endearment, and when she, too, was permitted to use them unchecked; but that was long ago, and they had been gradually drifting apart since the first months of their married life. And there had never been any children to draw them together again. Ruth had hoped and hoped each year more and more

faintly, till at last she had to let the hope go altogether; for "surely," she thought to herself, "he would love me more if I were the mother of his baby! And though I could not love him more than I do, than I have always done, it would be so passing sweet to teach *our* child to call him 'father.'"

But now she was glad that she left no little one motherless to battle with the world's harsh ways, and to be, perhaps, misunderstood by its surviving parent. "All God's ways are good," she used to say softly to herself. "Many and many a time I have asked Him to send me a baby of my own; a little, soft, cooing baby, such as other women fondle and carry at their breasts; a little tiny waxen creature, so frail and so helpless, such as the poor married women in the courts and alleys of this large town have year after year. And now I am so thankful that He did not answer my rash prayer. Oh, my God, my Father, how good, how kind Thou art to me."

Charles Pettifer was a vain, selfish, self-centred man, but he was not altogether a petrefaction. Some sort of human heart yet beat within his bosom, and he was moved as he had seldom been moved in all his forty years, when his pallid, shadowy wife prayed him to forgive her.

"I have nothing to forgive you," he replied, huskily. "I wish, Ruth, you would not speak in this melancholy tone; I shall be quite unfitted for my sacred duties on the morrow."

"You need not be uneasy on my account, dearest; it is all well with me, and more than well. But tell me one thing, Charles, and please don't be angry with me if I ask you a silly question; may I ask it?"

"Of course you may; when did I ever deny you liberty of speech?"

"Never, my dear! I did not mean to infer that you ever did; only sometimes you are vexed with me when I say foolish things, and no wonder; for I am stupidly foolish, I know, and your thoughts are so far above mine. I want you to tell me that you did love me in past time, that you love me still a little, just a little, because I am your wife?"

"Of course I love you. Every Christian man is bound to love his wife. But a man cannot go on petting, and

fondling, and whispering soft, foolish nothings year after year."

"No; I don't know that I should like them either; but there is a quiet, grave tenderness, a stedfast affection that shows itself in so many little words and actions. I have seen it. It is not incompatible with life's duties and responsibilities; it helps one to do one's work in the world, I am sure. But there, I am talking nonsense again. I will not tease you any more. And it is a great comfort to me that we have spoken together once more. Kiss me, Charles, and then go to your study; and remember, my dear one, through all the bright days that I pray God to send you in the future, that I always loved you most fondly, though I was too weak, and silly, and ignorant to be anything like what your wife should have been. But you will soon have your freedom again, and then you will be wiser than you were at two-and-twenty. Men of forty should not make mistakes, and you must be careful whom you choose. I should like your next wife to be a few years younger than yourself; a Christian woman, of course; clever and witty, and bright, and accomplished. And she ought to be beautiful and well-connected, and amply dowered. I have been thinking a great deal lately about your second wife, Charles."

"Really, Ruth, you are too ridiculous; you are talking the most intolerable nonsense. You are as likely to have a second husband as I am to have a second wife. The odds are pretty equal between us, my dear, though you are a few years my senior."

"No, dear, *no!* There never could be another Charles for me; but you may easily find and take to your heart, not another Ruth, but somebody infinitely more suitable—somebody who will not disgrace you when the high preferment, which I know awaits you, comes at last. I have hampered you, I am sure. I read the other day in a wise book that getting on in life was as much the wife's work as the husband's, though in different ways; and that no married man ever properly succeeded in his career, unless his wife did her part. Now, I have never helped you. I never knew how; I was not made for society, and I ought never to have presumed to be a clergyman's wife. I have been a burden on you all along—nay! don't say it is not

so, for I am sure of it. And now it is all over, and I shall not trouble you any longer."

"Ruth!" he said, in a low troubled voice, and with a scared look in his face, as something like a glimmering of the truth dawned upon him, "one would imagine you were going to die to-morrow!"

"I *might* die to-morrow," she said, musingly; "but I think I have a few more days to live. My dear, do not trouble about me, or you will not be fit for to-morrow. Why, Charles, you are crying. You *do* love me, then."

"Hush, Ruth, I cannot bear it."

"My poor dear, how thoughtless I am, and you have your services to-morrow, and no one to help you. There, do not distress yourself any more. I do not suffer much; it is only when the spasms come on that the pain is hard to bear. And God strengthens me to bear it, and I am very, very happy."

"Happy to go away from me—to leave me lonely and bereaved!"

"Yes; I am happy to leave you, dearest, because it is best for you. I have burdened you too long; do you think I do not know my own incapacity, my own inability to be all that your wife should be? My only merit has been that I loved you with all my heart, if indeed, it was any merit to love a man to whom any woman might be proud to give her whole and best affection. Flatter you? No, indeed, dear; I mean every word I say. For once, I am speaking to you out of the fulness of my heart."

"And you are not afraid of death,—of the awful change which you imagine awaits you speedily? Does not the sense of your sins oppress you? Is it not written—'without holiness no man shall see the Lord?' Ruth, my dear, don't rest on any fancied security that may fail you, when at last you stand face to face with the great enemy."

"Charles, my sins have all fled away; Christ has forgiven me, and He has granted me *His* peace. Through Him I shall enter into the glorious kingdom. He cannot fail me; I am not afraid. As for the enemy, dear, Death, as you call the transition, is no enemy of mine. Nearer and nearer he comes; day by day I feel him closer to me. Night by night I look for him, and he grows more and more beautiful, and his eyes are kinder, and the rustling

of his wings is like sweet music. He is my friend; perhaps when he comes quite close, and touches me, and tells me the moment has arrived, I shall look into his face, and see no grim terror, no gentle angel even, but my own dear Lord Jesus Christ, who has said, 'I will come again, and receive you unto Myself.'"

"Ruth, you never talked in this way before. I had no idea you *could* talk so. I have not done you justice, Ruth, my poor Ruth."

"I never could talk so before; I feel as if it were scarcely myself speaking to you. God has taught me so many things lately. He has shown me His love and His faithfulness, as I never thought to see them on this side the grave. I think, when one is *very* weak, one sees and knows something of the eternal joy and calm. Now go, dear; you ought to look over your morning's sermon; and I am so tired—so tired."

And Charles Pettifer went to his study, but not to look at the sheets of cramped MS. which lay upon his desk. He shut himself in, and wept like a child. "It can't be true," he murmured to himself,—"Ruth go away, and leave me! Ruth die, and go to heaven. It cannot be; and yet there is a look—and such a look in her face! I have seen that look before; it was when I knelt at the bedside of the dying. My poor Ruth! and I have been so hard upon her; God forgive me. And I never knew she was so good—so saintly. God forgive me."

That Saturday night, for the first time in all the years that he and Ruth had been married, his Sunday clothes were not laid out for him. His shirts lay as they were returned from the laundress, and his socks were still undarned in Ruth's old mending-basket, which she would never touch again—no, never, never more!

CHAPTER XXVII.

SUNDAY MORNING.

"I WONDER if any one is going to stay with Mrs. Pettifer this morning?" said Nora, as they rose from the breakfast table, to go to their separate rooms. "Mr. Pettifer *must* go to church; and though, of course, the servant remains at home, she looks so stupid and ill-tempered that she can be of no use to her mistress."

Miss Lane paused. "Really I don't know, Nora; but I dare say Mr. Pettifer has arranged it. Of course, some one ought to be with the poor woman; she is not in a fit state to be left to that servant, of whom they make so many complaints. A mistress with energy would have got rid of her long ago."

"To be so ill and weak must take away one's energy: I remember that my dear papa, when he grew so very much indispositioned, cared no longer to attend to things about which he had once greatly interested himself. Malady makes all the difference. Shall I run down to Bellevue, aunt? It will not take me more than five minutes, and it is yet quite early."

"No, no! I do not like you to interfere; we know so little of Mrs. Pettifer, and of course she must have friends among the ladies of the congregation. Mr. Pettifer will take care that she is properly attended to."

"I am not sure of that: he thinks there is not much the matter with her. I wonder if the doctor he talked about has come to visit her."

"No doubt he has, and high time too! I only hope he may not have been called in too late."

"You had better let me run round, *ma tante*."

"No, I cannot permit it: it will seem like intrusion. We shall be sure to see Mr. Pettifer after the service, if we watch for him; it is his nearest way home along this road.

Now, Nora, take your book, and read and meditate quietly till it is time to dress for church. I shall expect you to finish Alleine's 'Alarm to the Unconverted' this week."

"I do not like the book, and it is so very dull, neither can I quite understand it."

"Ah, Nora, there will come a day when you will in vain regret your indifference to holy books. Take care, Nora, take care, you are despising the truth; and you would rather fill your mind with vain and foolish stories, and worldly ballads, than spend your precious time in reading the Word of God."

"But that book about the 'Unconverted' is not God's word. It is not the Bible."

"I will not argue with you any more; but remember, Nora, that I *warned* you! When the day of your calamity comes, remember that I warned you!"

"Warned me of what, *ma tante?*"

"You know, Nora, better than I can tell you. You know you are not a converted character, you have never been awakened to a sense of your own exceeding sinfulness. Your soul is black with sin, and you do not trouble yourself about it; but the god of this world has blinded your eyes, and hardened your heart, and you are heaping up wrath to yourself against the day of wrath!"

This reference to the day of wrath was continually being made by Sarah. It was one of her favourite expressions. She was terribly afraid of the day of judgment herself; if a great thunder-storm broke over the town she always had a latent fear of what might be coming; but she liked to present the terrors of that awful day to other people, especially to the impenitent. Rhoda had long since left off listening to her; but Nora could not help shivering and trembling when her aunt depicted the dreadful scene —God with a frown on His face, Jesus Christ turning sorrowfully away—two distinct Gods it seemed to Nora—herself at the left hand, among the *goats*, hurried off with the wicked into the everlasting flame. "Oh, Nora, Nora," were her aunt's last words as she walked away that morning, "pause before it is too late! Think what it must be to spend eternity in hell, to live for ever and ever without hope, to dwell with lost spirits, weeping, and wailing, and gnashing their teeth; yourself a lost one among the

lost! Think, Nora, of the dreadful fate of the finally impenitent, and repent while yet the day of grace remains!"

When Nora got to her own room she found Rhoda there, filling the toilet decanter with fresh water. Nora's eyes were full of tears—nay, they were running in streams down her cheeks. She had counted upon half an hour's solitude before it would be time to dress for church, and so she had given way as she left her aunt's presence, and the tears had come thick and fast as she slowly ascended the stairs.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Nora; but are you in any trouble?" said Rhoda, when, after lingering as long as she decently could, she felt she must speak or leave the room.

"I am so sad, Rhoda," replied Nora, still weeping. "My aunt has been telling me how wicked I am, and that I am what is called 'unconverted,' and no unconverted person, she says, can enter heaven; and I know it is so, for our Lord Christ Himself did say, 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' So there is no doubt about it; and what if I am not born again, and what if I die without this new birth that I have never had? Rhoda, are you ever afraid of dying unconverted, and going to the place of torment?"

"I used to be, Miss Nora. There was a time when I hated my life, and hated pretty well everybody about me. I am not sure but that I hated God for His hardness and unreasonableness, and that seemed the worst of all. Only it was not the true God, the dear God that loves us, that I hated and shrank away from; it was the shocking fierce idol that some people put into His place, and tell you to love and worship it. Missis, she was at me morning, noon, and night to flee from the wrath to come—to get converted, as she said. And I did try; I read my Bible and I prayed; I even cried sometimes, and then I was so pleased, for I thought one could not repent without shedding a great many tears, and being very miserable, and so I hoped I was beginning to repent in real good earnest, and might hope to be forgiven sooner or later. But the more I tried, the wretcheder I grew. The Bible said I must *love* God, and how could I love Him? You

see, I did not know Him, Miss Nora, and nobody can love what they don't know."

"How did you come to know Him?"

"I can hardly tell you. I suppose He came and showed me Himself. He knew I was feeling after Him, as it says in Acts, and so He let me find Him; and when once you've found Him, there can be no mistake, and you can't let Him go again—leastways, He will never let you go. I think it was Dr. Bethell's prayer, when your poor grandpa lay dying, that showed me first what God was—God in Christ. Then I knew that the God out of Christ was no God at all, any more than the stocks and stones that the heathen bow down to. I *saw how* Christ and His Father were one God, not *two*, the one a great deal kinder than the other; and somehow, I'm sure I can't tell you how it all came about, Miss Nora, but I grew to love God with all my heart, and the more I loved Him, the more reverence I had for Him, and the more I wanted to please Him. And now, I don't want to be saved to escape hell-fire, but that I may be with God for ever and ever. But your aunt says I am not converted yet."

"That is a comfort, Rhoda. Perhaps, after all, she does not know."

"She *don't*, you may be sure of that; neither does Mr. Pettifer. If you don't go their way to heaven, they think you can't go at all."

"There is only one road to heaven, they say."

"That's true, and yet it isn't true. This is Bradfield, and if you wanted to get to London, you must *turn your face in the right direction*. You may go by rail, or the road, or the canal, it don't much matter which, but you must have your face turned right. You won't get to London if you look as you go towards Bristol. Now, Miss Nora, is your face turned towards heaven? are you really wanting to go there?"

"Indeed I am; God knows that."

"But why are you wanting to go to heaven? Is it just because you are afraid of the other place?"

A sudden light came into Nora's face. "No," she cried, "it is *not*. It is God I want to be with. I do want to be with God, to feel His unseen presence while I am in this world, and to see His face in the other world

beyond. I am not worthy—how can I be? but my face is turned towards Him, I am sure of that. I want to work for Him too; and, Rhoda, the more I think about God, the more I love Him and trust Him, and the less I am afraid of Him."

"Then, Miss Nora, you need not fear. Never mind what your aunt and Mr. Pettifer say; read your Bible quietly, and if I were you I wouldn't read any of missis's books about religion; keep to the Bible only till you are stronger, and tell God everything; take all your troubles, big and little, to Him. And now I must go, and I beg your pardon if I've spoke too free; but I was in such darkness myself, in such a muddle, I may say; and the light is so beautiful after the darkness, and the simple love of God so sweet after all the muddle of explanations of what wants no explanation, that I couldn't but speak, for I should like everybody to taste and see that the Lord is gracious; and blessed is the man, or woman either, that trusts in Him. When people don't feel blessed, it's because they *don't* trust Him, that's what it is, Miss Nora."

"Yes, my face is turned towards God," said Nora, when, left alone, she began to put on her bonnet for church. "Yes, and I do love God—that is, I love Jesus Christ more than I can tell; I would suffer for Him, I hope; and Jesus Christ is God revealed in the flesh, God made manifest to us poor sinners. It seems to me that these good people, the Pettifers and the rest, do not know what conversion really means. They seem to think it is a sort of dreadful operation; that one must cry and groan, and struggle and despair for ever so long before one can be forgiven. And yet the Bible puts it forth as a *free pardon*. 'Lost!' yes, that is terrible; but one cannot be lost holding fast on to Christ, and I do hold on to Him, and He knows it, and I feel that He holds me, and will never let me go. And if I can't remember any sort of great crisis in my soul's history, what does that matter?—people's souls' histories must differ as do the histories of their common every-day lives; and conversion means *turning*—Dr. Bethell made me see that—it's not accusing one's-self of all sorts of sins, some of which you have never dreamed of committing; it is enough to say, 'Lord, I am most unworthy; I have done nothing to deserve

Thy favour, only I love Thee, and Thou lovest me; and I want to live a new life which shall be all to Thy praise and Thy Glory—a new life which shall be the beginning of the other better and grander life which I shall live, when this little span of life is over.' Yes, I *do* know which way my face is turned; oh, Rhoda, that was a heavenly idea of yours, but the good God put it into your head. My face is turned towards heaven, because wherever my God is there must be heaven; and the most beautiful, comfortable place that can be imagined would be hell if *He* never came there and never would. There is no joy without God, no peace, no rest; but with Him there is a happiness that one must feel, if one would know anything about it. My poor aunt! and she fears still to die, because she cannot trust her Father's love; she thinks of her sins, her vileness, she says. What is sin? What is vileness? It is being alienated from God; it is finding one's chief pleasure in those things which are not well-pleasing to the Lord. It is not following after Christ in the things we do. And to be converted is to turn the other way—to turn one's back on sin, and look to God, the God-man, Jesus Christ. We love Him because He first loved us!"

But all this Nora said to herself in French. She never spoke English when she talked to herself, especially when she was feeling deeply. And that was perhaps one reason why she and her aunt were so far from coming to an understanding on religious subjects. Miss Lane had got into one peculiar and very repellent groove of thought and feeling, and she used the strong technical language in which people of her opinions generally delight. She really did believe that "God is love;" but she scarcely dared admit the fact so as to apply it to herself, still less would she preach the pure evangel of love and mercy to other people, lest they should presume too far, and depend too much upon this mercy, which was only for covenanted persons who had passed through certain experiences, and well mourned over their depravity.

And Nora, on her part, could never find words to say all that was in her heart. She could chatter English glibly enough now, for all ordinary purposes, only that she sometimes made very ludicrous mistakes, and now and then adopted a slang word, without in the least knowing

what she did; or made use of a too strong expression, without understanding its full import, as when she called Mr. Pettifer a "sneak." But she could not feel strongly, and speak English; and I need not say, she always prayed in French, and sang French Protestant hymns, and some few that were not Protestant, but only Christian, in preference to the psalmody of her adopted country. Added to this, the quaint theological volumes which her aunt insisted on her diligently perusing, were written in such a style, and couched in such strange set phrases, that she was sometimes obliged to read them with a dictionary at hand. There was one book which was her especial horror; a book which pretended to reconcile the doctrines of predestination and free will, and which the Misses Grice were very fond of quoting. But the more Nora read it the more confused her ideas became, till at length she shut the book, saying—"I will read no more of it; perhaps it is that I am stupid, but it seems to me to say that Christ only died for a few chosen people, and that God made many thousands of people expressly to be damned." Nora always said "damned," and you must not quarrel with her for it, for she merely meant condemned. The French have no idea of the word in any other sense; and they do not use it as it is used with us, for profane purposes of cursing and swearing; to them it has a deep religious meaning, and no other. So Nora wisely shut the book, saying, "If it be not a bad book it is bad for me; it would make me think hard things of God; I will no more of it!"

By the time that Nora had dressed for church the traces of tears were gone; she looked as she felt—quietly, calmly happy, for the sweet words, "We love Him because He first loved us," were still sounding in her ears, and filling her heart with a great joy and peace, that she knew could not be taken from her. Miss Lane always looked particularly grim on Sunday; she had the notion so common to people of her school, that it was necessary to maintain an unbroken, solemn gravity on the Sabbath-day; people who lived with her said her temper was always bad on Sunday, and certainly she was harder to please on that day than on any other, and Mr. Pettifer's greatly-prized ministrations did not tend to dissipate the gloom which seemed to

be her normal state of feeling on the first day of the week.

And now, seeing Nora's radiant face, she put it all down to hardened impenitence; and it never occurred to her that Nora had a right to be happy, because her sins were forgiven her. She had not gone about getting them forgiven in the orthodox fashion, therefore she could not be forgiven at all!

There is as much red-tapeism in religion as in anything else. And as they knelt together that Sunday morning, aunt and niece side by side, Miss Lane uttered the responses of the Confession with awful emphasis. She was saying them on Nora's account far more than on her own.

Mr. Pettifer looked weary and haggard, as well he might, for he had not slept, and in the still hours of the night he had been thinking how hardly he had judged his wife, and how little happiness he had given her, and how wretched he would be if she were taken away from him before he could make amends. Conscience was wide-awake at last, and he *knew* that he had been cruel,—yes, *cruel* to poor Ruth, who loved him so truly, and had done her duty according to her lights. And her lights! He had believed them to be very dim and obscure,—now, he was not at all certain that she did not see much more clearly and much farther than himself. He rose early, and tried to finish the sermon which still lay uncompleted on his desk; but thoughts would not come, or, if they came, he could not arrange them to any purpose. Even his commonplaces seemed to desert him: his pen, which had been wont to run glibly enough upon the sermon paper, halted as it had never halted before, till at last it dropped from his listless fingers, and he let it lie, careless whether his discourse were finished or not. For on the unwritten page, even on the walls of the small room, he seemed to see three words inscribed—"Ruth is dying." The birds twittered it, the yellow autumn leaves rustled it, the old clock at the stair-foot ticked it, and he said it to himself over and over again—"*Ruth is dying!*"

His congregation wondered what ailed him, for no one save the Lanes knew that Mrs. Pettifer was more than ordinarily unwell; they thought he must be ill, for in the

Lessons he faltered once or twice; and he made so long a pause before commencing the *Litany*, that a score or two of heads were lifted in surprise. And then to the still greater astonishment of nearly all present came the words, half choked—"The prayers of the congregation are desired for Ruth Pettifer, who is seriously ill." There was almost a sob in his voice when he came to the petition, for "all sick persons; *especially her for whom our prayers are desired.*" And yet, though he felt the strong conviction that Ruth was passing from earth to be no more seen, he never dreamed but that at least several weeks of her drooping life remained. "She will never see the winter," he said first, and then he added, "No! she will never see the last flowers of the autumn." But that she would never see another Sunday he could not and would not believe. He scarcely knew how he got through the service, and how afterwards he bore the condolences of the churchwardens when they came to him in the vestry, with the usual orthodox expressions of sympathy and pious comfort. And in order to avoid such of his congregation as he was likely to encounter, he turned down some back streets, and took a most circuitous route homewards. And so it came to pass that Nora and her aunt watched for their pastor till they were weary; he never passed their gate, and Miss Lane began to wish she had allowed Nora to go to Bellevue that morning, as she had proposed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE STAR "WORMWOOD."

NORA and her aunt were taking their early tea when they were rather startled to hear a footstep on the gravel near the window. Sunday visitors had no more place at "The Woodlands" than Sunday cheerfulness; and I need scarcely tell you that kitchen guests were forbidden on any day of the week. The milkman was the only person who ever enlivened the dominical solitude of Miss Lane's maiden household. Then there was a ring at the door-bell, and both ladies began audibly to wonder who it could be. They had not long to wonder, for the maid, quite as surprised as her mistresses, ran quickly to admit the visitor—and lo! it was Mr. Pettifer.

"I hope Mrs. Pettifer is not worse?" was naturally Sarah's first inquiry. And the answer was—"No! no! I am thankful to say she is rather better than worse; but I am in a difficulty about this evening; I have no one to take the service for me, or I would gladly remain at home, and she ought not to be left."

"Was she left this morning?" asked Sarah, feeling a little conscience-stricken.

"Well, yes; that is, she was left with Harriet our servant, who is not to be depended on; and Mrs. Pettifer does not like her, and, indeed, is rather afraid of her. It will not occur again. I shall engage an experienced nurse to-morrow. Lambert says she must never be left without proper attendance. It *is* heart disease!" And Mr. Pettifer's voice sank, and he grew very pale. "He admits, at least, that there is something very wrong with the action of the heart; but there are also complications of other diseases. Ruth made him speak pretty plainly, she says; but of course I know nothing for certain. He left word with the girl that he was coming up again this evening after service—to see me, she imagined."

"Of course he wishes to see you. He could not say all that was necessary to Mrs. Pettifer; and you would like me to go and sit with her while you are at church?"

"I should like it very much. It is just what I should have proposed, trusting to your Christian kindness not to regard the request as an unwarrantable liberty on so short an acquaintance. And I should have thought Mrs. Pettifer herself would have preferred some truly Christian person, with whom she could take sweet counsel; but nothing will do but that she must have Miss Nora for a companion."

"Nora! nonsense! What can a girl like Nora do in a sick-room?"

"I assure you, *ma tante*," put in Nora, "I can do much. Ah! did I not minister to my dearest papa? He said I was to him an inexpressible consolation. Ah, yes! I have seen sickness, and I have seen *death*. *Ma tante*, I will go to Mrs. Pettifer, I am not afraid."

"Perhaps not; but you are not at all the person to be with an invalid. Suppose Mrs. Pettifer should ask you to pray with her?"

"I can pray;—prayer is only speaking to God."

"It is only the prayer of the righteous that is effectual, that availeth much," replied Sarah, with gloomy emphasis. That Nora's prayers should be heard at the throne of grace, she could not believe. Moreover, she was excessively annoyed at the girl being preferred to herself; though from her want of self-control, her abrupt movements, her tendency to worry, and her foolish, low-bred habit of showing every emotion of the mind in her face and in her voice, she was a most untrustworthy person in the chamber of an invalid.

Mr. Pettifer saw she was ruffled, and in any other case he would have put Nora aside with a strong hand: but Ruth had pleaded for Nora, and begged so earnestly that she might not have Miss Lane, or Mary or Martha Grice, or Miss Gruesome Greenway, or any other lady member of St. Mildred's congregation, that Mr. Pettifer—wonderfully softened for the hour—promised her that he would fetch Nora, and no one else. "Though why she should want a girl like that, without Christian experiences—a girl, indeed, who makes no profession of religion, and has been

brought up half a Papist—is more than I can fathom. A mere invalid's caprice no doubt, but her wish shall be gratified. I will never cross her again, poor Ruth!" was his soliloquy as he accomplished the short walk from Bellevue to "The Woodlands."

"It is just Ruth's whim," he said, apologetically. "Of course you would be far more suitable; but she has set her heart on having your niece with her this evening, and I cannot bear to oppose her. It may be"—and again his voice sunk and shook—"that she may not have many more requests to make. I should like her to be gratified in this instance."

"Very well; though I think it is a most preposterous arrangement. Nora, go and put on your bonnet—your every-day bonnet will do, as you are not going to church. And mind you do not spill medicine, or any mess, on that new black silk!"

"I am going to change it; I should not like to go into a sick-room in a silk dress; silks rustle so, and hurt the nerves of people who are really ill. I found that out long ago. I will not be many minutes, Mr. Pettifer."

When Nora came downstairs she found that it was arranged for Rhoda to follow her, to be at hand in case she was wanted, while the obnoxious Harriet went to church. This gave Nora great satisfaction, for she had felt rather afraid of being left in sole charge, in case one of the dreaded "attacks" should come on; and Rhoda always had her wits about her, and was to be relied on in any sort of extremity. So with many cautions, not to talk too much, and not to talk at all on worldly subjects, and to be very exact in pouring out the medicine, which was to be taken precisely at eight o'clock, Nora departed, in charge of Mr. Pettifer. She and Rhoda would return together about nine o'clock, when Mr. Pettifer would certainly be at home again.

She found the invalid looking so much better than on the previous Thursday, that she felt quite assured. Perhaps, after all, Mrs. Pettifer's case was not so hopeless as they had assumed it to be; she had taken the doctor's draught twice, and it had done her good, or so she thought. She did not guess, neither did her husband, that the green-labelled bottle contained only a much diluted

and disguised stimulant. Mr. Lambert had seen at a glance that drugs were of no avail; a little weak brandy-and-water would afford temporary relief, and prevent the excessive exhaustion which induced the fatal spasms; but even that could not long be administered, a very few days would close the scene, and that was partly what he was coming to tell Mr. Pettifer that evening; only partly though, for he could not be comfortable without seeing his patient again before he slept; because, as he told his wife, "very sudden changes are to be apprehended in a case like hers; she may be gone to-morrow, or the next day. I shall take the nurse with me, the patient must be carefully watched all night."

Mrs. Pettifer not only looked better, but happier. And she was unutterably happy, for her husband had sat by her the whole afternoon, talking and reading to her; after his hasty dinner he had devoted himself entirely to her, till he set off in quest of Nora, and he had been "so kind," poor Ruth said. He had caressed her, he had tenderly smoothed her pillows, he had called her "my dear," and "Ruth dearest." He had looked and spoken as he looked and spoke in those sweet, long-faded old days of their courtship and early wedded life; and the poor thing was inexpressibly cheered and comforted. She smiled quite brightly as Nora came to her bedside. "So good of you, my dear," she said; "so very good! And so good of dear Charles to fetch you. And you have your own maid with you? That is nice; it will be so much more comfortable for you; and Harriet can go to church, she is so very cross if she is kept in on any account on Sunday evenings. And I shall not give you much trouble, my dear; you shall read to me a little, and talk to me a little, and you will have to give me some beef-tea every hour."

Nora was quite sure she could manage very well, and a little after six Mr. Pettifer went away.

"It was so very good of you to come," said Mrs. Pettifer again, when they were left alone. "I thought you looked so kind, and that you would not mind coming."

"No, indeed! I am so very, *very* glad that you sent for me. And be sure you make good use of me. Do you know you are looking ever so much better? you have almost a colour."

"Have I? I have had such a pleasant afternoon with my dear husband; it has done me more good than anything else; and he will think of it, and be comforted when I am gone."

"Perhaps you will not go—at least, not so soon as you think?"

"It will be very soon, my dear; sooner than any of them think. Next Sunday I shall be with my God, behind the veil, on the other side; and I shall know what the wisest of you cannot be sure of here. I am not frightening you, Miss Lane?"

"Oh, no, no! but please call me Nora: *ma tante* is Miss Lane. I like to listen to you; it is good to hear what a person really feels and thinks when—when——"

"When death—or what we call death—is close at hand."

"What we *call* death?"

"Yes; for I do not believe in death: I am not going to die, Nora. The world is slipping away from me, and I shall leave something behind me that is done with, and must be put away out of sight, just as we put away clothes that we have outgrown and worn out; but *I*—Ruth—am going to God to live for ever and ever."

"Some people are so much afraid of death; some Christian people even."

"It seems so strange! Afraid to see Jesus—to look into His face! Afraid to trust one's self to God! I cannot understand it. The only sting of death is leaving what we love behind us; but God takes care of all that. He loosens the ties that make us cling to this life; He sets our spirits free, and we long to go to Him. Ah, how good God is! I lie still sometimes, and think of His goodness—His goodness in little things, till I cry for very joy and gratitude. And then I want to be nearer to Him, to speak with Him, 'face to face.'"

"But shall we ever see *God?*"

"We shall see Jesus. There is no doubt about that! We shall see Him as He is; and so we shall see God, the great eternal God, the mighty World-Father, wearing the likeness of man; for the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. And it seems to me that when God became man, He was united to the whole human race; He

became the universal Father—my Father, your Father, the Father of all spirits. 'In Adam all die:' we see that daily; nothing is commoner than dissolution: we want no proof of that, for every day we witness the decay of nature, which Adam represents—but *in Christ* ALL *are made alive!* We have to believe that, to have faith in the assurance, for we see no visible proof of it; but not surer is nature's death than the immortal life which Christ has given us—children of Adam—in Himself. And 'He is not a God of the dead, but of the living; for all live unto Him.' And knowing all this, feeling all this, shall I be afraid? When I think of these things, I rejoice that God calls me—calls me to begin that new and unknown life of which we here know so little—only that we shall be 'for ever with the Lord.'"

"I could envy you," said Nora, almost sadly. "How sweet it must be to stand just outside the golden gates, knowing they will be opened very soon, and to hear the heavenly song, and know that we are almost ready to take up the strain. I sometimes wish I were seventy or seventy-five; it could not be very long then."

"My child! but you must not wish that. Your life is before you. You must work, and be happy in your work."

"I do not seem to have any proper work to do. I very often think I am of no use in the world."

"God will send you work, if you earnestly desire it. It is not His will that any should live to themselves alone. Your work will come to you; then you must take it up, and do it for Christ's sake. See! it has come to you to-night. God has called you here to tend and comfort me."

"That is scarcely work; it is a privilege. I am so very glad to be of the least service to you."

"Nevertheless, it is your work for the hour, and God gives it to you to do. Remember, dear, that we must not strive to be doing great things; there is always a lowly work of love to do in God's name. Every kind word, every little action of kindness, is counted up by our Father as service done to Him. Nay, you know what was said about the cup of cold water?—'Ye shall in no wise lose your reward.' You must be content to work, dear child, it may be for many years—rest will come at last."

"And rest seems so sweet! Don't you think those whom God calls away in youth are greatly blessed?"

"All whom God calls to Himself are blessed; but it is not more blessed to go in youth than in old age."

"Some people's lives seem so empty."

"God can fill them. He does fill them. But at your age you ought not to feel empty and world-weary."

"And I do not know that I am often really weary; only it seems so good to have done with all life's cares and crosses—to lie still, waiting for the Master's call."

"The Master's call to you, my dear, is, 'Up and be doing!' And in obeying it you will find a wondrous joy and sweetness. He will strengthen you, too, in all your labour. He will teach you how to do things well. He will make you patient, trusting, ready, and willing, not only to do, but to suffer, all His will. Only be content to leave yourself in His hands; it is the only sure happiness you will find. And, my dear, if you get very tired—God does let us get tired sometimes, that the rest, when it comes, may be all the sweeter—if you get very tired with the noonday heat and the long afternoon, remember that, sooner or later, the evening will come—the cool, quiet evening, when you may *go home*. For this change, that people call death, is going home—just that, and nothing more. Ay, and nothing less; it is so good to be going home to God. Now will you read to me?"

Nora took up the Bible and asked what she should read.

"Whatever you like," Ruth said.

And Nora answered: "I should like the fourteenth of St. John's Gospel; Christ's own words are always the best."

And so Nora read those precious words, which have been as rich music to dying ears for so many centuries. And afterwards she turned to the close of the Book of Revelation, and read of the city where they have no need of the sun, nor of the moon; the city where there is no more night, no more pain, nor weariness, for the former things have passed away.

"Thank you, my dear," said Mrs. Pettifer; "now read me those verses you will find marked in the little blue book on the table. I want you to read them for yourself, as well as for me." And Nora read from a well-known collection of translated German hymns:—

"Lord, the waves are breaking o'er me and around,
Oft of coming tempests I hear the moaning sound;
Here there is no safety, rocks on either hand,
'Tis a foreign roadstead, a strange and hostile land.
Wherefore should I linger? Others gone before
Long since safe are landed on a calm and friendly shore;
Now the sailing orders in mercy Lord bestow,
Slip the cable, let me go!

"Lord, I would be near Thee, with Thee where Thou art;
Thine own word has said it, 'tis 'better to depart.'
There to serve Thee better, there to love Thee more,
With Thy ransomed people to worship and adore;
Ever to Thy presence Thou dost call Thine own;
Why am I remaining, helpless and alone?
Oh! to see Thy glory, Thy wondrous love to know—
Slip the cable, let me go!

"Lord, the lights are gleaming from the distant shore,
Where no billows threaten, where no tempests roar;
Long beloved voices calling me, I hear;
Oh, how sweet their summons falls upon my ear!
Here are foes and strangers, faithless hearts and cold,
There is fond affection, fondly proved of old!
Let me haste to join them; may it not be so?
Slip the cable, let me go!

"Hark! the solemn answer! Hark! the promise sure!
'Blessed are the servants who to the end endure;
Yet a little longer hope and tarry on;
Yet a little longer, weak and weary one.'
More to perfect patience, to grow in faith and love,
More *My* strength and wisdom and faithfulness to prove;
Then the sailing orders the Captain *shall* bestow—
Slip the cable, let thee go!"

And then there was silence in the quiet room; only Mrs. Pettifer said, as Nora closed the little book, "My dear, it is written—'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.'" And Nora leaned back in the cushioned chair, wondering how it felt to be sure that the "sailing orders" were being spoken! What could it be like—watching the fading evening tide, and knowing that only a few, a very few more suns would set before the great change came—to hail the glimmering morning light, and feel—"This is my last day; when it closes, I shall be beyond the stars, this frail life ended, and the better never ending life begun!" And then Nora of the sacred words she had read—"I will come

again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am there ye may be also." Would Christ really come and smile upon His dying child? Would the dark-robed Angel of Death lift his solemn veil, and show—oh! no form of gloom and terror, but the face of a *dear Friend!*—the one friend, whose love is perfect and never failing!

It was a heavenly calm that filled that chamber, all was so very still. The church bells had ceased their pleasant chiming and their quick tolling: the wind rustled through the fading leaves, and sighed about the house—as it does sigh, as with a breath of resignation, on peaceful autumn evenings.

The fire burned low and clear; and the gas-lamp from without dimly lighted the chamber. Nora would not light a candle lest she should disturb her patient, who seemed to fall comfortably asleep, as soon as she had taken her beef-tea. So, she sat quite still, thinking how this Sunday evening was unlike any Sunday evening that she had ever known; she thought of Ruth's empty place in the church —the place she would fill no more. And there would come to her, as there had come now to Ruth, a last going to church, a last joining in the hymn and public prayer, a last crossing of the threshold of the house, a last coming upstairs, a last lying down on the bed, a last look on all around:—a last breath, a sigh—and then—the other side of death, the unknown and mysterious world beyond the grave.

"And oh! my God!" was Nora's silent yearning prayer, "my Father, make me so ready for that hour that I may meet it without a fear. Whenever Thou callest, whether it be soon, or after long years, let me hear Thy voice, and not be afraid. Let my work be done; let me too say, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course. Lord, I have waited for Thee, I have looked for Thee; now call Thy happy child to see Thy face.' For *I am* Thy child. Lord, I know that now nothing shall disturb my soul any more; my hope and my trust are in Thee. And Thou art my Father. Give me strength for all I have to do and to bear; make me strong and make me patient, and take me at last to Thine eternal joy."

And still Nora would have prayed, only there came a sudden sound from the bed. Was it a cry, or was it a

long gasp? In the dim fire-light, she could see that Mrs. Pettifer was struggling for breath. She rang the bell, and Rhoda came up—how thankful she was that Rhoda was in the house. Rhoda lit the candles, and then they saw that a great change was passing over the invalid. Nora and Rhoda had both seen the same thing before, and they knew what that strange aspect meant. "Brandy, directly!" cried Nora. "The doctor said she must have her medicine with brandy in it, as much as she could take, if one of these attacks came on."

But Ruth could not swallow, the power was gone. "It is of no use, dear," she whispered—"I am going! If only Charles would come back!"

"He will be here soon," said Nora; but she looked at the time-piece, and it was not yet eight. She felt that Mr. Pettifer ought to be summoned. "If there were only some one we could send to St. Mildred's," she whispered to Rhoda. Rhoda had made up her mind. "Write a line, Miss Nora," she said; "it will be safer than sending word; and I'll manage it."

"But I can't let you go, Rhoda; at least, I think not. Let me see."

"I will not be gone five minutes. There are people next door. I saw them in the garden till it got dark. If they have human hearts in their bodies, they will go."

In less than five minutes Rhoda came back again. "It's all right," she telegraphed across the bed. And now the girls had only to watch the dying woman, and to keep her raised upon her pillow. They tried more than once to administer the prescribed stimulant; but it was all in vain.

"It's no use," said Ruth, faintly, "I am past all that; I am going." She could only speak in short gasping sentences, and the effort seemed to increase exhaustion. "Hush, don't speak," said Nora; "it hurts you to say a word. No, I am not frightened, and Mr. Pettifer will be here soon."

Meanwhile, a neighbour's son had taken charge of Nora's missive. He comprehended the case, and promised that the note should at once be given to Mr. Pettifer, even if he had to go up the pulpit-stairs himself. Nora had only written, "She is dying, come as quickly as

you can." When the young man entered the church, Mr. Pettifer was hopelessly hammering away at the opening of the "Seventh Seal." Whether his congregation gathered any notion of his meaning, I cannot say; but it is quite certain that he had not one clear idea on the subject himself, and he dwelt upon the "silence in heaven about the space of half an hour," till his congregation was utterly weary, and devoutly wished that there might be a similar silence in St. Mildred's Church.

"He shall have it the moment he's done his discourse," said the stiff beadle; "I wouldn't for any money go and disturb a clergyman in the middle of his sermont."

"But I tell you the man's wife is dying, and asks for him," replied the youth. "I promised he should have that bit of paper without delay, and if you won't take it up, I will; and if you try to hinder me, I'll shout out to him, "Parson, shut up, and come home; your wife is dying!"

The poor beadle looked mightily scared and discomfited. "They might do such things in them Dissenting places, where there's no order nor reverence," he thought; and said afterwards, "It was an unheard-of proceeding to go up to a Church of England *Eppis-kopple* clergyman in the pulpit, and give him a note in the middle of his preachment!" But then this *might* be an exceptional case; parsons' wives not making a practice of dying during the Sunday services. "I'll speak to the churchwarden," he said at last. "I'll go by him; I won't have the responsibility."

"Be quick, then," urged the stranger youth, "or I shall take the responsibility on myself."

But Mr. Pettifer, already nervous and anxious, saw the parley, and knew that he was summoned. A sickening sense of dread came over him; he could not see the written words of his sermon, still less could he remember a single sentence, or put together two consecutive thoughts. "And there fell a great star from heaven," said Mr. Pettifer, vacantly, and perspiring at every pore. He wiped his forehead, drew a long breath, and assured his hearers that a great star *did* fall from heaven. And yet a third time:—"And there fell a great star from heaven, my friends! yes, a great star! and the name of

that star was—the name of the star was——." For the life of him, Mr. Pettifer could not recollect the name of that dreadful star; he took up the Bible, but he had lost the place, and could not find it again. He was "clean dazed," as country-people say; and he confessed afterwards that his faculties were so far suspended that he was looking for his text in his Epistle to the Romans! It was of no use; he shut the Bible in an agony of mingled confusion, distress, and apprehension of what awaited him, and in a loud, unnatural voice, began the usual "Now to God the Father," &c., which brought all the congregation to their feet in a state of irrepressible amazement. The concluding hymn was, of course, omitted; indeed, the unhappy man forgot all about it; and how he pronounced the familiar words of the Benediction he never knew. He contrived to say something, however, which was partly inaudible; and then, after burying his face on the cushion in orthodox fashion for the space of three seconds, he dashed down the pulpit stairs, past the stupified beadle, and into the vestry, where already the churchwarden and the young man with Nora's note had betaken themselves.

"I'll call a cab," said the churchwarden, sympathisingly, while Mr. Pettifer tore off his gown and bands and seized his hat. "No! I can't wait; I'll go the short way," he replied; and, before anything further could be urged, he opened the door and rushed out into the darkness, and was more than half way home before his congregation had dispersed. In far less time than he had ever before accomplished the distance between Bellevue and St. Mildred's, he reached his own door. But his speed was useless; he was too late! Ruth was gone where no kindness nor unkindness could ever touch her more. After one of the spasms she had closed her weary eyelids, smiled "as if she saw the angels," Rhoda said, and quietly passed away.

And Mr. Pettifer knelt, in the silence of the night, by the still white form, that was all that remained of his poor, loving, patient Ruth—his faithful wife, whose affection he had so ill repaid. All his past neglect, all his cruel, bitter words, all his hard reproaches came back to him now; and, overwhelmed with that most poignant grief which owes its sharpest edge to keen remorse, "I have broken

her heart! I have killed her!" sobbed the unhappy man in his lone despair. "Oh! Ruth, Ruth! if you could come back to me for one year, only one month, I would make your life as happy as I have made it wretched. Oh, my God! she wanted so little from me—her husband—so little kindness contented her, and I withheld that little. And now she is gone; my poor, poor, wronged Ruth!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

NORA'S PIANO.

AFTER Mrs. Pettifer's death, a weary time set in for Nora. The autumn, which had been singularly soft and mellow, suddenly broke in wild storms of wind and rain, followed by premature night frosts, which stripped the last leaves from the trees, blackened the dahlias and China-asters, and killed the tender bedding-plants which careless people left too long unhoused. It rained and blew every day, and scarcely ever could a walk be taken. Gertrude and Fanny Bethell were in London, and no invitation came for some weeks from St. Oswald's. How tired Nora grew of sewing and of making puddings, and of looking at the dingy backs of her aunt's books, as they filled the shelves of the old-fashioned mahogany bookcase. There was a quantity of old unbound religious magazines on the top shelf, a pile of defunct "Moore's Almanacks," a dozen or two funeral sermons, accumulated by the late Mrs. Lane, who favoured that style of literature, and at last had the honour of a funeral sermon preached, printed, and published on her own account. People were much addicted to preaching and printing funeral sermons and "improving occasions" in those days, and the result was an immense stock of this kind of publication on the hands of the local book-

sellers. Then two whole shelves were filled with ancient bound volumes of the *Christian Magazine*, which, like Jean Paul's grandfather, were eminently "poor and pious." They commenced somewhere about the 1785, and they were continued up to the first quarter of the present century and later. They were miserably printed, of course, on wretched paper, and their dismal-looking bindings alone filled Nora with dismay. However they might have been appreciated once, they pertained to the dead literature of the past, and Nora wanted something belonging to her own day and generation.

Then there were some few other books which Miss Lane said were frivolous, and which the younger lady thought were amusing, but very foolish: they were chiefly "Blossoms of Morality," and "Moral Tales," and youthful stories of good little children who were very good, and generally died early; and of bad children, who were very bad, and came to an evil end, gored by a mad bull, or starved to death in a desert island, where they made their last dying speech and confession to barren rocks and hungry wild beasts, who, it is presumed, took notes of what they heard, and sent them across the sea for the warning and benefit of other youngsters who were inclined to follow wicked ways. How Miss Lane came by this charming selection she scarcely knew; but there they were, together with two or three such improving novels as "Fatherless Fanny," "The Farmer of Inglewood Forest," and "The Cottage on the Cliff." Also there were on the lowest shelf, as being most in request, and handy to reach, Boston's "Fourfold State," Baxter's "Saints' Rest," Alleine's "Alarm to the Unconverted," when it was not in Nora's keeping: Erskine's "Gospel Sonnets," Sturm's "Reflections," Hervey's "Meditations in a Churchyard" or "Among the Tombs," Young's "Night Thoughts," "A Voice from the Tombs," by an unknown author, and "The Judgment Day: a Poem by Aurelia," all of which lively literature was considered ample food for Nora's mental appetite.

"You look bilious, Nora," said Martha Grice one day, when she came in and found Nora alone, nursing the cat and hemming kitchen dusters; "you don't take sufficient exercise."

"How can I, when it rains all day and every day?"

"What do you do with yourself?"

"Nothing particularly. I read—only there is nothing that I care about; and I sew, and patch, and darn my stockings, and nurse pussy, and talk to her when I am quite alone."

"You should study. At your age study is very important."

"I wish I could; but how can I study without books and without teachers? I have a few books of my own, but I have been through them again and again. The Bethells lent me some, but I finished them long ago."

"Do you like music?"

"Dearly, and I can play very tolerably, I believe; but I have no piano, not even a guitar—I could always manage the guitar, even when I was a little girl. I do read a certain quantity of the History of England every day." And Nora pointed to an ugly, unwieldy folio covered with green baize and lying upon the side-board.

The result of this conversation was a private interview between Sarah and Martha, in which the latter represented that Nora was wofully wasting her time, and that her education *ought* to be carried on. "Why not give her every advantage?" she urged, in conclusion. "You can well afford it, Sarah. She is too old to go to school, but she might have good masters, you know."

To Nora's great astonishment, next day her aunt, who had taken the advantage of a fine morning to go into the town, walked her into the largest musical instrument warehouse in Bradfield, and began to inquire the price of several pianos. "Choose one," said Miss Lane at length, abrubtly, "and choose a good one, that will stand a lifetime, and never mind a showy exterior."

Nora could scarcely believe her ears; her aunt was certainly going to give her a piano.

"This is a beauty," she said shily, running her fingers lovingly over the ivory keys. "I am sure this is a very good one; a *Broadwood*, too; but I am afraid it would cost too much."

"What is the price?" asked Sarah.

"A hundred and twenty guineas, madam," said the shopkeeper, who was only lately down from London, and

therefore addressed his lady customers as "madam," while all the Bradfield tradesmen called them "*mum*" or "miss," if they called them anything at all. Sarah walked away. A hundred and twenty guineas, indeed, for a thing one could live and die without! And Nora was desired to try "another and less expensive instrument." And Nora tried not one, but many instruments, from £30 and upwards, but there was not one like that which she had instinctively called "a beauty." And her aunt began to think—"I shall not miss a hundred and twenty guineas; I should not miss three times as much. I may as well do the thing handsomely, if I do it at all, and it is better to do it at once and for ever than to have to do it twice over. I suppose the best is the cheapest in the end." Then she turned to Nora, and inquired if she were sure "the instrument" was of the very best. "I am certain it is very good," replied Nora, scarcely daring to hope that it might be hers.

"I have not another like it," said the shopkeeper. "I will warrant it for thirty years, if it is not ill-used. You can have it for a month on trial, if you like, paying the usual expenses, and giving proper references."

"No, I will pay for it at once. You may have it, Nora. Give me pen and ink."

And Sarah took a blank cheque from her purse, and filled it up, asking for "discount" as she did so. And discount she got without the least demur. And the dealer, as he looked at the signature, recognised his customer, for by this time Sarah Lane was known to be the richest woman in all Bradfield, and her name upon the right sort of paper was regarded with admiration and with reverence. And so Nora got her piano, and learned that after Christmas she was to attend classes and take lessons in several things.

Two events, however, occurred before Christmas arrived; and they must be noticed because both had to do with Nora's history. Rhoda rebelled against the ministrations of Mr. Pettifer, and refused to "sit under him" any longer. Not for two or even three pounds a year more wages would she continue to attend St. Mildred's Church. And what was worse, she professed herself a Dissenter, and declared that she would go to

Carvary and nowhere else, and that she had a right to choose her own religion.

"Ah," said Sarah, shaking her head; "Mr. Pettifer is too faithful; that is what it is, Rhoda."

"I don't know about too faithful, ma'am," was Rhoda's reply; "but he preaches sin and the devil everlastingly, and I like a preacher that preaches Christ. And he's no more fit to preach that 'course' he's begun—expounding *Leviticus* on Sunday evenings and *Hebrews* on Thursday evenings—than I am to cook for Queen Victoria. I should make a mess of my fine dinners, and he makes a regular hash of his sermons."

The other event was Sarah's purchase of Wood Cottage, the next house to "The Woodlands." Partly she bought it because it stood empty, and she did not like an untenanted house next to her own, and she determined it should be let; and partly because she found her money accumulating quite inconveniently, and Mr. Salisbury had assured her that, though a very paltry investment, Wood Cottage and the ground on which it stood was, as far as it went, an excellent piece of property.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE NEW YEAR.

CHRISTMAS came and went. The old year passed silently away, and the new year came in with a clear, keen frost, that made the long-muddy roads hard and firm once more. The wintry sky, though pale, as English skies in winter always are, was cloudless and bright, with as brilliant a sunshine as our northern clime can know. Light, feathery snow and frosted rime had jewelled all the trees and hedges; even the iron lamp-posts in the unromantic streets and roads of genteel Arleston were turned into columns of pure pearl, set here and there with diamonds; and the garden palisades, and the grassy edge of the broad gravel footway, and even the door-scrapers, were as changed and beautiful as if they belonged to some El-Dorado region, where gems and precious metals were the order of the day.

Nora had never seen anything like it before, and she was delighted. The previous Christmas had been mild, and what Rhoda called "muggy." There had been heavy rains, plenty of dirt, chilly mists, sprinklings of snow, which melted into brown mud as it touched the ground, and no frost at all to speak of. This white, shining, glittering world was something entirely new to the passionate child of the sunny South, and she actually cried with pleasure as she stood at her bedroom window shivering with cold, yet unable to turn away from the fairy loveliness without.

Nora had expected to spend some time with her friends at St. Oswald's Rectory. They had duly invited her, and Miss Lane, though she looked very glum when Gertrude's note was read aloud to her, did not forbid her to accept the invitation. Well in hand as she had her niece, she knew there were several points on which she could not

compel her obedience, and one of these was her intimacy with the Bethells. Nora had distinctly said that she would never give them up; and Sarah knew by this time that when Nora spoke in a certain tone, and looked in a certain way, she meant what she said, and would keep to her word in spite of every opposition.

But a day or two before Christmas-eve came a bitter disappointment. News arrived from St. Oswald's that there was illness in the house. Little Herbert was in bed with scarlatina, and Laura was extremely unwell, and manifestly sickening for the same malady. There were no dangerous symptoms, and the doctor hoped that both children would have the disease mildly. Still, there was the risk of infection, and it would be some weeks before it would be safe to receive a visitor, especially one like Nora, who had never had any kind of fever in her life. So Christmas-day, and all the days that came after, had to be spent at "The Woodlands," and a very dreary season it was, for Miss Lane only kept Christmas as a Church festival. Nora's father had always made a point of keeping up something like an English Christmas in his foreign home. There had always been an attempt at hot *rosbif*, and a pudding that would not have disgraced the most hospitable board in London was annually concocted in the household of Monsieur Lane, and pronounced a great success, though secretly viewed with suspicion by Louison and her own particular friends. And on Christmas morning Nora always had some little present to receive, and Louison had a new cap, or a gay knot of ribbons. Without exactly knowing why, Nora had learned to regard the *Jour de Noel* as one of the brightest and happiest in the whole year. And the last Christmas spent with the Bethells had, in spite of bereavement and exile, been a very happy one. What a pleasant gathering it was round the large dining table! What a Babel of tongues, young and old! what a charming evening of music, and games, and talk about everything! And for the first time Nora comprehended something of the true joy of the blessed Christmas-tide, and the "Angels' Song" spoke to her heart as it had never spoken before.

But now it was so different, "*si triste!*" she said, when she returned home from the morning service at St.

Mildred's, where the service had been miserably conducted, especially the "service of song," in the baldness, and dulness, and flatness of which the congregation seemed to pride themselves; and where Mr. Pettifer had preached for three quarters of an hour about nothing in particular. Sarah Lane had always kept the day as a Sunday, and as a very gloomy Sunday; though, for the matter of that, all her Sundays were as gloomy as if the angels had never sung "Peace on earth" to the shepherds keeping their night watch in far-away Palestine; as if the stone had never been rolled away from the sepulchre; as if the great joy of Easter had never flooded all the green earth, and all the sunlit seas, with anthems of loud praise, ringing out the words, "Christ has arisen—let us keep the feast!"

In virtue of some strange whim, Sarah generally had a cold dinner on Christmas-day; so upon "cold stalled ox," and a very plain plum pudding, aunt, and niece, and maid-servants were regaled; and after dinner Nora was allowed to play a little sacred music, while Miss Lane went to sleep over the diary of a hyper-Calvinist preacher, whose specialities lay in proclaiming continually the fact of his own election, and the reprobation of all who ventured to differ from him on certain dogmas—the volume having been kindly lent by Mr. Pettifer, who had lately presumed to cater for the literary repasts of both ladies. In the evening they went to church again, and there were about twenty people by way of congregation; the organist did not put in an appearance, and the choir, such as it was, broke down in the *Magnificat*, and in the middle of the sermon, while Mr. Pettifer was floundering about as usual in a morass of doctrines, the gas went out, and the Doxology was feebly sung, and the Benediction pronounced by the light of the pulpit candles. On the whole, Nora was very glad when Christmas-day was ended.

The last night of the old year came, and there was a special service at St. Mildred's, and Mr. Pettifer preached what his admirers called "a very faithful and very solemn sermon!" and very solemn it was—nay, very awful, for the discourse was sulphureous exceedingly, and treated of the torments of the damned to a wonderful extent; and as, according to the preacher, only a "chosen few" would be preserved from eternal perdition, it may be imagined that

the "faithful sermon" was very far from consolatory. After expatiating largely on the miseries of lost sinners, he warned his flock that the greater part of them might, ere the close of another year, be lifting up their eyes in the place of torment, and he bade them turn to Christ, that they might escape the fearful doom of the finally impenitent.

"A most precious discourse!" said Mary Grice, as they all walked home together under the stars. "Nora! I hope this sermon will be blessed to you: I do hope, ere another year closes, you will be numbered with those who are the children of God."

But Nora broke in with—"Miss Grice, I believe I am God's child! I always was His child, though once I did not know it, and did not care about it. Now I feel He is my Father: I love Him, I trust Him; I want to see Him all the days of my life, and I am looking forward to that other life or lives which I shall live with Him when my earthly life is ended. And I do not think that sermon was 'precious;' I do think it was a very bad sermon, and I should not think the Lord Jesus liked it."

There was a dreadful outcry from the three spinsters, and a severe reprimand from Sarah. "Unhappy girl!" she said, with awful emphasis, "what do you know of the Lord Jesus?—you have not made Him *your* Saviour!"

"*Ma tante!* I could not make Him that! He was that before. I was born. Yes; I think I do know something about Him, and He knows something about me. That is my great comfort. But I don't think—I am quite sure He does not want people to be frightened into religion. They—people, you know—may be frightened into outside propriety, just as I frightened my cat, who wanted to eat Rhoda's linnet, by rubbing her nose against the bars of the cage. I hurt her so much that she won't go near the cage now; but she likes linnets just as much as ever. And sinners like sin just as much as ever, if they only keep away from it for fear of those 'everlasting burnings' we heard about to-night; and that sort of mind won't make them fit for heaven, where Jesus dwells. Oh, no! we must serve Christ because we love Him, or all our service is vain; but '*we love Him because He first loved us.*'"

And Nora's voice sank almost to a whisper; for she had

what she called a great "*épanchement de cœur*" when she talked about the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. The lonely girl had come literally to feel the full force of the words—

> "Jesus, the very thought of Thee
> With sweetness fills my breast."

And the name which is above every other name was as music to her ears. She could not speak of Him, her Saviour and her best Friend, without emotion, and her voice involuntarily took a tenderer tone, and her eyes filled with happy tears when she spoke about Him. Mary Grice was fairly astonished. Martha was not; for she had for some time discerned that there was something in Nora far deeper than the other two could fathom. Martha knew that Nora was a Christian. Mary was bewildered; for she had no notion that people who had not passed through certain experiences could possibly be "in Christ."

"But," said Mary, "you have not been properly convinced of sin."

"I know that I am a sinner."

"That is not enough; you must bewail your lost estate."

"But I am not lost; Christ has saved me."

"Before you can be sure of pardon you must feel your own exceeding depravity—you must mourn your sinfulness with cries and prayers and tears."

"Do you think everybody must feel the same? Must one person's soul history be just like another person's soul history? Did the good God make us all after one pattern? For me, I did not think much about my sins till I had come to love Christ; then I thought of them and was sorry; but I can't say I cried those bitter tears, or made those groans you and *ma tante* talk about. I thought more of the goodness that I would strive after than of the badness that I hoped to put away from me. The badness was gone; it was forgiven, I knew, but it could not be undone, except as the goodness might make amends. I was sorry, but not so very sorry as the people I read about in the books called 'Memoirs.' I could not be, for I was so happy to feel that God had forgiven me, and that I did truly love Him."

"But without sorrow how can you repent?"

"Repentance means turning round, going the other

way. I am trying to go the other way—the way that pleases the dear God; and every day He shows me bit by bit the road that I must go. But I end as I begun, by saying that the sort of religion that comes out of being afraid of hell, and what you call the 'eternal death,' is no religion at all. My own dear papa did use to say to me, 'my child, do this,' or 'my child do not that;' and I did this thing and did not that thing because he was my own dear father, and I loved him truly; also because as soon as I had sense I knew that he would only tell me to do that which was best for me, and that those things which he charged me to leave undone were just the things which would make my injury and my unhappiness. And so I obeyed my blessed father in love, and he was satisfied. But I am sure he would not have been well content if he had found out that I obeyed him only lest I should be punished, and to escape certain evil consequences that would come upon me if I did disobey his wishes. And it is the same with the great Father in heaven; He will not count as service that which is rendered to Him for fear and not for love; and I could not love God if He were like what Mr. Pettifer says He is. No, I like not his sermon, for I am quite sure it is not true."

Mary Grice groaned aloud, she scarcely knew why—chiefly, I suppose, on Nora's account, for she quite believed that her pastor preached the Gospel, the whole Gospel, and nothing but the Gospel, and that all people who did not agree with him were in danger of God's judgments—which said judgments, being interpreted, meant simply retaliation. But Martha held her peace; she was just beginning to have a dim notion that her "views," as the Bunn and Pettifer set called their opinions, were not so entirely Scriptural as she had once believed. She had even gone the length of going to hear Dr. Burrowes preach on a certain occasion, and, what was more, she had enjoyed his sermon. But neither her sister nor Sarah approved of her wandering away from her own pastures; and Mr. Pettifer, who intensely disliked Dr. Burrowes, had actually scolded her as a possible recusant, and warned her against "itching ears," with an arrogance which he knew very well how to assume, and which had a great deal to do with his unpopularity.

Though he affected to despise popularity, and to reckon it as the wages of tampering with the truth, saying, "God forbid that I should ever be a popular preacher!" it secretly chafed him to behold, Sunday after Sunday, the many empty pews at St. Mildred's, and he knew, in his inmost heart, that he would be glad to see crowds thronging to the church—even the aisles crammed and jammed with eager listeners would not have discomposed him. But crowds never came; and from month to month the congregation grew thinner. No wonder that he should reprove Martha Grice, hitherto one of his staunchest supporters, when she wandered away to the "Old Church," as St. Olave's was generally called, to listen to the heresies of its obnoxious rector.

Two hours later Nora was securely shut up in her own room; she made up her fire, and put on a warm dressing-gown, then she tied a shawl over her head, and lastly she opened the window, and looked out into the night. All was still as death; no footfall sounded along the quiet road, not even the tramp of a policeman or the distant sound of carriage-wheels in the great thoroughfare so near at hand broke the profound silence of the hour. The stars glowed and glittered in the deep blue heavens above; the snow-sprinkled lawn beneath, and the frosted evergreens showed palely in the shadow of the trees; even the gas-lamps burned with a solemn light, Nora thought, as, with her arms resting on the window-sill, she set herself to watch the old year out and the new one in; though why she did so she scarcely knew, for she had never heard of such an observance as a watch-night, though she had gone more than once with Louison to midnight mass, in the old, old days that would never come again.

"How still it is!" said Nora, talking to herself as usual in French; "and how grandly the sky looks with all those stars! Are they worlds like this, I wonder? Are they the abodes of the blessed who have passed away from life's cares and turmoils? I have heard it said it may be so. Well! that is what I cannot tell, what I shall never know till I, too, leave this world, and go to dwell with God. And it does not matter one bit where heaven is, or what sort of place it is, because, wherever it is, or whatever it is like, it must be a glorious land. Christ said, 'I

go to prepare a place for you;' and the place that He prepares must be—ah! I cannot think what!—so happy, and so blissful, and so bright—the land where there is no more sorrow, nor pain, nor parting from those we love.

"And the old year is dying! In a few minutes it will be gone. A whole year has passed away since Gertie and Fanny and I sat talking over the fire twelve months ago. And what have I done with the year that is on its death-bed? Have I used it well? Am I nearer to God than I was when it began? Have I learned to love Him better, to serve Him better? I do think I have. I do believe God Himself has been teaching me all these months. I am changed from the old Nora I used to be—the foolish Nora that was so afraid to die—the Nora who cared only to please herself, and who was proud, and passionate, and vain! Ah! I am proud and passionate now; but I do think the good Lord is making me better—at any rate, He is making me wishful to be a better child to Him, and to do His will with a more loving heart. And with the new year, Rhoda says, we should begin afresh to work and labour for Him. Ah! but have I ever begun to work for God? It is upon my conscience that I do nothing for my dear Lord, who has done so much for me. Did He not say that we who call ourselves by His name must bear fruit to His glory? Can I be a Christian, and yet do nothing for Christ? But what is my work? I seem to have none. When will God show me what work He would have me to do?"

It did not strike Nora, for she was yet young in the Christian life, that simply and quietly *waiting* is sometimes what God requires from His children instead of active service. She did not think that God would count up her patience, her meekness, under her aunt's hard, selfish rule, her surrender of herself to a life which seemed ever and anon unbearable, weary, and monotonous, because she believed it would be her duty so to do. She did not remember how she had comforted poor Ruth Pettifer in her hour of trial; she did not give herself any credit for many little secret acts of self-denial, which no one about her ever noticed. She began to fear she was an unprofitable servant, and she cried earnestly to God

that He would show her what she might do for Him. Nora had no teacher now but God; perhaps it was well for her that she had been removed from the ministry of Dr. Bethell, for hers was essentially a clinging nature, and she might have learned to put too much trust in man, and to depend too fully upon human teaching. Strange to say, she had wonderfully developed in character, and her soul had grown in stature rapidly since she had lost the ministrations which she prized so much, since she had only had Mr. Pettifer's crude, harsh, imperious expositions to listen to. Happily, Nora's was a strong, brave nature, and she could hold her faith in spite of the theological tempests which thundered in her ears, and she could separate the grains of truth, which were offered to her, from the whole mass of chaff, of folly, and of falsehood in which they were presented.

Presently she could hear the bells of the old church ringing out the dying year; softly, yet sadly, they came on the clear, still night air, a requiem for the past. Oh, that they could indeed ring out the false, the want, the care, the sin, the unfaith of the world!

"They will ring them out in time," said Nora, as she listened to the mournful music of the midnight bells. She had been reading Tennyson's "Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky," as you will easily understand. "In Memoriam" had been one of her father's especial treasures, and it was one of the few English books she brought with her from France. "Yes, the bells will ring out all wrong some day—in God's own good time. He works slowly and surely, and so perfectly! Our work gets all wrong; we have to undo it, and do it over again; and sometimes we make rash and foolish mistakes that we cannot set right. God's work is so sure, so complete, and oftentimes so silent, we never know it is doing, till one day we turn and look, and lo! it is then all finished, and perfect, nothing lacking and nothing superfluous. Oh, my God, let the bells ring out year by year more of the darkness that is about us all, more of the envyings, and strifes, and narrow creeds that hinder Thy truth, and let them ring in the love of truth and the spirit of charity. What did the poet mean, I wonder, by 'Ring in the Christ that is to be'? for men have known Christ for

nearly two thousand years, and He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever! Ay, but men have not known Him, as He is—I mean very few have known Him, and only now are men beginning clearly to understand Him and His great work. They have known long that Christ died for us, but they scarcely yet understand that He lives for us now; that He lives with us in the commonest details, and accidents, and affections of our daily life. I did not understand it a little while ago. When Dr. Bethell said that all nature and all human life was interpenetrated with Christ, I could not catch his meaning. I do now, thank God! and, whether my life be a full life or an empty life, it must be, it will be, hidden with Christ in God; and that is the only true life, either here or in the unknown worlds to come. And, my God! let me not be idle in Thy vineyard; let me see my work, for there *must be* work waiting for me; and make me both willing and able to do it well; and let this new year that is coming be the best I have ever known. Let me learn more and love more as its months roll on, and bless me as Thou only canst bless, and I shall be blessed."

And then there was silence, and then the clocks in the town slowly struck the hour. The Old Year, with all its cares, and sins, and sorrows, was dead; and, in the breathless hush of the moment, it seemed to Nora as if once again she watched the passing away of a human soul. But as the clocks ceased striking, the bells rang out again, no longer sadly and slowly, but with a joyous, clashing peal that sounded like a strain of praise and thanksgiving.

And then Nora drew out from an envelope some verses which Gertrude Bethell had sent her, and which she was not to read till the new year came in. These were some of the verses which Nora read; they are too good not to transcribe, and they are not so widely known, so familiar as they well might be:—

"O good New Year, we clasp
This warm shut hand of thine,
Loosing for ever, with half sigh, half gasp,
That which from ours falls like dead fingers' twine;
Ay, whether fierce its grasp
Has been, or gentle,—having been, we know,
That it was blessed; let the Old Year go.

"[illegible] Lord, each to him.
[illegible] that [illegible] he is dark.—
When our feet [illegible] and stumbling wills is strife,
And how [illegible] whose rage was more marred
Than any man [illegible] with him,
Take Thou it calmly at Thy feet —and to the unrest—
[illegible] that I will give you rest.

"For long come ancient love
Above that unknown way,
And year to year we our arms reach some,
And our hands [illegible] to work while it is day.
But I that way must lose
Sometimes —, strong nature my facing eyes.
The lamp of life, the hope that never dies.

"Comfort our souls with love—
Love of all human kind —
Love special, those—in which the sheltered love
Each weary heart its own safe nest may find:
And love that turns above
All lovingly contented to resign
All loves, if need be, for the Love Divine.

"Friend come thou like a friend,
And whether bright thy face
Or dim with clouds we cannot comprehend,
We'll hold our patient hands, each in his place,
And trust thee to the end.
Knowing thou leadest onward to those spheres
Where there are neither days, nor months, nor years."

"That is *good!*" said Nora, drawing a long breath when she had read the lines through a second time. I like that! It is strong and tender, and it is full of faith. Ah! I see, that is the secret of its strength and tenderness. It is only faith that can be strong and tender; want of faith must always be weak, and harsh, and cowardly." And then she shut the window, first stretching out her head as far as possible, and saying, "A happy new year to all I love—a happy new year to everybody in the world—to all God's living creatures!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

CHRISTIANITY NOT A SYSTEM.

It was April before Nora paid her visit to tho Bethells; and the pleasure so long deferred was only intensified by delay. St. Oswald's looked blacker and grimier than before, and the people in the streets were dirtier and ruder—or so it seemed to Nora—than when she quitted Salamanca House. But the church was full, and full chiefly of working people; the Sunday-schools were thronged, and there was a "Mechanics' Institute," scarcely freshly planted, but rather a restoration of what had fallen into decadence, through indifference and neglect, as well as from want of funds.

"If you were the heiress, instead of your aunt, Nora, I should ask you for a large subscription," said Dr. Bethell, one day, when they were all busy making a new and complete catalogue of the library, to which some hundreds of volumes were being added. "These books, and the expenses attendant on our lectures, are exhausting our resources with frightful rapidity."

"And if I were as rich as *ma tante*, I would certainly give you all you want," said Nora. "But she does not believe in Mechanics' Institutes, she thinks the people are too much educated already. She says that 'knowledge is power,' and that power in the hands of the working classes leads to revolutions."

"And so it does. Miss Lane is a clever woman, only she does not see quite far enough. Revolutions need not necessarily be rebellions. The moral and political earthquakes, which historically we call revolutions, do not really make half the changes in empires and in common life which are attributed to them. They are only the outcome of long and half-expressed convictions, of half-suppressed strivings, of hidden forces that have been

overlooked. In this country we are slow at revolutions; it took two centuries or more to frame Magna Charta. All the sins of the Tudors were expiated by the hapless Stuarts. The first Reform Bill was born more than fifty years after the first throes of political freedom had begun to shake the soil. And since 1832 we have had nothing but one ceaseless, bloodless, persistent revolution. The last thirty years has been one long revolution, though not recognised in our history as such."

"Do you know, Dr. Bethell, they say you are a republican?"

"I am, and I am not. Our government is virtually a republic, the best republic on the face of the earth; only, instead of an elected president, we prefer an hereditary sovereign. It is said that royalty is more expensive to the nation than presidency; but I am not so sure of that. I doubt if, in the long run, we should save a paltry thousand or two, if we did make up our minds to emulate our friends on the other side the Atlantic. Some things that look the cheapest prove the dearest in the end. May Queen Victoria long reign over us, and her descendants after her, till they prove themselves incapable or unworthy of the high trust reposed in them!"

"Will such a time ever be?"

"Judging by the experience of the past, it is not unlikely. Dynasties, like all other earthly things, in their turn become effete, and pass away, either silently and naturally, or by great upheavings of the nation. All things exhaust themselves in time, even royal lines. The fashion of this world passeth away—only God's Word abideth for ever. So I am called a republican?"

"I have heard you so called, and I said you were not."

"Right! Always say that; for in the common acceptation of the word I am not republican. Only last week I was told that I was an infidel."

"Oh, Dr. Bethell! Were you not angry?"

"Not a bit of it, my dear; though my silly old Madge was. Words are only words! the odium of infidelity depends very much upon what is really meant by it. There are a certain set of people who call you an infidel if you don't take everything for granted. I wonder where these very men would be now if those who came before

them had never doubted anything! Because our forefathers believed certain dogmas, are we, therefore, bound to believe them also?"

"What are dogmas?"

"Petrified truths, Nora; also fossil falsehoods."

"But are not truths *always* truths?"

"Undeniably; but truth is progressive: a vital thing must progress! A solution may be true, but not adequate, or only adequate for the time being; just as various fundamental points of science are true in themselves, yet only imperfectly developed; and out of one truth grows another which nobody has hitherto adduced, the time for it having not arrived. Galileo proclaimed truth so far as he went: out of it grew the far grander truth of Newton. But who thinks now of stopping short at Newton? though all honour to him who showed us the germ of that which has since been more fully wrought out as scientific revelation. All truth is expansive; for all truth, whether it be natural, philosophical, or what we call theological, is of God. The mind of God is illimitable and fathomless, and He takes ages, ay, æons to reveal it to the creatures whom He has made. In the beginning He revealed all all that was necessary to salvation; but the revelation still goes on, and will go on, perhaps, for ever and ever, for there can be no bounds to the Infinite. Then comes the inquiry, What *is* salvation?"

"*Ma tante* and Mr. Pettifer say it is escaping condemnation; literally, being saved from hell. I think it is not that."

"It is a thousand times more than that. It is to be saved from sin—not only from the consequences of sin, from which Christ, however, *does* save us, if we are willing to be saved, but from the power of sin. Salvation is not mere pardon, though we want that at the outset of the Christian race, and continually as we pursue our course upwards and onwards—salvation is sanctification, revelation, ever increasing knowledge, going from strength to strength, and from glory to glory, even to *perfection*."

"Perfection! Can we, who are sinful creatures, ever reach perfection?"

"Nora, what did Christ say?"

"He said, '*Be ye therefore perfect.*' I have often

wondered at it, and asked myself if it were really possible."

"Do you suppose our blessed Lord would ever have enjoined what He knew to be impossible? Did He say it as a mere incentive to holiness, think you? on the principle that he who aims at the loftiest standard of all will reach greater heights than he who is content with lower summits? In short, would Christ say what He actually did not mean?"

"Of course not. But I thought perhaps He meant, 'Be as good as you possibly can be!'"

"We might have received such an interpretation, had He never finished the sentence, which proves that He wills our full and not our comparative perfection; '*even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect!*' That is very plain, Nora, and let us carp and criticise as we may, there is no misunderstanding it. We must be '*perfect*' even as our Father in heaven; perfect as Christ, in whom the Father was revealed."

"But how can it ever be? The more I see and know of God, either as the Creator and the great World-Father, or of God as made manifest in the flesh, the more I recognise a perfection which I cannot attain unto; which I can reverence and admire, but cannot even comprehend. I can never, strive as I may, be perfect in this life; and yet Christ *did* say it, and no saying of His is to be put aside."

"This is not the only life, Nora."

"Do you think we shall advance in the life that is to come?"

"I do indeed; I believe it most heartily and most solemnly. Also I believe that after death there will be no supernatural change in the soul any more than there has been on this side the grave. A new life will be ours indeed, under new conditions at which now we cannot, dare not, guess; but we shall begin there where we left off here! we shall still grow in grace and in the knowledge of God. I think it will be one of the great joys of the world to come to feel ourselves coming ever nearer and nearer to God; for the yearnings of a soul which God Himself has awakened to spiritual life will never be satisfied with less than perfect righteousness, perfect likeness to Christ

Himself. This life is the very infancy of our being: when or how we shall come to the full stature and maturity of that being's manhood we cannot tell, we do not want to know; we are content to leave it with our God. We know enough for the tasks we have to do; we need not try to look beyond the veil; God, who loves us, in whom we trust, will bring us safely to the end. Only let us be sure that we do trust Him completely, and that our great purpose here is to grow like Him, to follow in His footsteps. There is a day coming—how far off neither I nor any human soul can tell; but it is coming, as certainly as any day next week will come in its appointed time; the day when all things shall be complete in God—the day of which the apostle wrote, 'Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power. For He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.' "

"Is death always an enemy?"

"Inasmuch as death includes suffering, pain, and mortal separation. Death is more of an enemy to those who are left than to those who pass away."

"Some people are very much afraid of death."

"It is a pity that any Christian person should fear to die. One never need be afraid to follow Christ. If He had never died, we well might dread the great dark mystery of death. But where our dear Lord has gone, we may go too, for the lamp of His love shines through all the gloom, and it is a lighted way, dark and lonely no longer. He has led the way, He has conquered death; let us, when He calls, arise and go to Him, as a child confidingly runs home at night when its mother beckons it."

"That seems very sweet and simple. I should think the fear of death comes chiefly from not knowing Christ."

"It does, it does! The more we really love Christ, and prove our love by our obedience, the more we shall want to be with Him, to see Him as He is. Yes, it is all very simple; only we must have Christ for our centre, our foundation; His death must be our life, and His life must be our strength.'

"Then Christianity is—what is it? I know, and yet I cannot say."

"Christianity is Christ! Christianity is not theology—not a system. If it were, it would have died out of the world ages long ago, for systems are but for a time—for a limited time, as God wills; but Christianity—humanity made one with the Divine—is eternal. It is capable of endless expansion, of the most diverse adaptabilities. Men must form systems; for systems, like sects, are an infirmity of human nature. But the religion of Christ, though it may form the basis of innumerable systems, can never itself become a system, fixed and definable. Systems die or decay, because the human race is progressive; and what, simply as system, suits man now, will not suit him a century hence. Even the systems of the various churches change, expand, or narrow themselves according to the needs and cravings of the age in which they exist. That which is stationary stagnates, and presently collapses; but the eternal truth is ever the same, and yet ever new, because it is Divine—it is Christ Himself, for He said, '*I am the Truth!*'"

"Still, it is not wrong to systematise?"

"Certainly not; the wrong lies in attaching too much value to any system. An overweening love of system has produced the false dogma of infallibility; it has been the downfall of the Church of Rome; it may be the downfall of the Church of England; it may be the downfall of unestablished churches. To care more for system than for simple truth, is to care more for the raiment than for the body, for the husk than for the kernel; and yet the body must be clothed, and the husk is essential to the kernel. Listen, Nora, I will read you an extract I made the other day from the writings of a dear friend of mine:* 'Make any religion into a system, define its outlines clearly, and before long there will be no movement of thought about it, no enthusiasm of feeling, no vital interest in its ideas. It suits the time at which it is put forward, but when that time has past, it has nothing to say to men.

* *Note.*—This is an anachronism: the quotation is taken from Mr. Stopford Brooke's "Christ in Modern Life," which was not published till some years after the period at which Dr. Bethell is supposed to be speaking.

But let system be foreign to it—let its original ideas be capable of taking various religious forms—and it will have the power of expanding for ever, of becoming systematic without ever binding itself to system; changing its form not only in every time, but in every country, and growing in a distinct ratio to the growth of the world. Therefore, we say the original want of system in Christ's teaching insures its power of expansion, and that fits it for the use of the Race, now and hereafter.'"

"I think I understand. Christ's teaching is for all time."

"And for all eternity. Who shall say when our days of scholarship are done? Who shall say, but that for ever and for ever we may sit at the Master's feet, and learn fresh marvels of His love, and receive fresh manifestations of His glory? And now, my dear, I think we have talked theology long enough. I hope I have not puzzled you. If I have, put all I have said out of your head—at least do not dwell upon it. Content yourself with resting all your soul on Christ, trusting alone to Him for pardon, peace, and wisdom. One mind cannot receive that which another mind eagerly grasps—the Lord has made us to differ. You may let go what I hold fast, and I may cling to what you put aside; but let us both hold fast to Christ and to His simple Word—let us 'abide in Him'—then we shall be safe, even though this earth should be dissolved and pass away."

Nora's visit was prolonged beyond her hopes; she stayed on at the earnest request of her friends week after week, and when, early in June, they went for awhile to London, she went with them, and afterwards accompanied them to the coast, where they sojourned for yet another month. The summer had almost passed away when at last Nora went back to Arleston.

CHAPTER XXXII.

FAMILY SECRETS.

ABOUT twelve or fourteen miles to the north-west of Bradfield lies the smaller and still smokier town of Wolverham. It is a very ugly town, and decidedly unfashionable, but of no small importance to the country, since it is one of the great centres of the iron trade on which so much of our national commercial prosperity depends. And innumerable iron-works and blast-furnaces do not tend to make a neighbourhood desirable, except for purposes of trade.

Naturally there is continual daily intercourse between the two towns, for two railways—known as the high and low level lines—run between them; and the trades of Bradfield and Wolverham are closely connected, and, indeed, frequently amalgamated. Bradfield could not get on at all without Wolverham, and Wolverham would scarcely prosper if disjoined from Bradfield.

One fine, warm afternoon in May, the Bradfield train going north stopped at its appointed time at Wolverham. A good many people got out of course, but with only one of them have we anything to do. And that one was Mr. Pettifer, in most unclerical attire. Generally speaking, that gentleman rather plumed himself on his orthodox appearance as a clergyman of the Church of England—a phrase he was particularly fond of using and applying to himself; he always managed to wear unexceptionable black garments; his waistcoats were always properly cut in the true ecclesiastical fashion; his white neckties were just the thing; he wore black gloves, and a hat that might have befitted an embryo archdeacon. But now, as the Rev. Charles emerged from the archway which conducts all railway travellers into the town itself, his most intimate friends would scarcely have recognised him; a second,

and even a third glance might have been necessary ere one could feel quite satisfied as to his identity. He displayed a very shabby, ill-fitting, and decidedly antiquated suit of a material known as "grey mixture;" an extensive blue necktie, smoked spectacles, and a wide-awake hat, slouched over his face. Even his very gait was altered, for instead of the sober, measured pace of an evangelical clergyman, he had adopted a sort of walk which might have been denominated a swagger, and was about as eminently unclerical as any walk could be. The broadest Churchman, with muscular Christianity on the brain, would have paused ere he committed himself to so unsaintly, not to say so disreputable, a carriage and demeanour! I verily believe if Sarah Lane and the Misses Grice had met him that afternoon in the streets and lanes of Wolverham, they would not in the least have recognised their well-beloved pastor; indeed, I am not sure that poor Ruth, had she still lived, would have known her husband without an introduction, though she might have said to herself quite innocently, "Dear me, how that flashy man reminds me of my Charles!" It was not the first time by many that Mr. Pettifer had worn this highly scandalous costume; yet, strange to say, the wife of his bosom had never seen him wear it, and did not even know that he possessed it; for he kept it and a few other things which were strictly private property, and not included in all the "worldly goods" with which he endowed Ruth when he led her to the hymeneal altar, in an old hair-trunk, which stood in a closet of the place he called his office, being, in point of fact, a small, dirty, stuffy room, closely adjoining the back premises of St. Mildred's, and where it is presumed that he transacted certain parochial business, and received visits from such of his parishioners as preferred to enjoy his society in "the den," as he occasionally termed the office.

There had already been one or two small scandals connected with this den; Ruth, happily, knew nothing about them. It is, perhaps, a wise dispensation that men's wives are usually the last to know their husbands' most private affairs, when those affairs are such as would at least cause uneasiness. Certainly, in the case of Ruth Pettifer, her ignorance was bliss; and I think, had

one tried to make her wiser, he or she would have acted cruelly.

But let me at once explain that Mr. Pettifer came that afternoon to Wolverham on no errand of iniquity. If anybody is anticipating a delightfully improper little episode in the history of the incumbent of St. Mildred's Church, I am sorry, for they are doomed to be disappointed. Mr. Pettifer came simply *to see his sister!*

But why, you ask, should he visit his own sister in disguise? She was not an inmate of Wolverham jail; nor was she hiding her shame in any kind of female penitentiary. She was not even in a lunatic asylum. And yet Charles Pettifer visited her by stealth, and no one at Arleston knew that he had a relation at Wolverham. The fact is, Mr. Pettifer was wofully ashamed of his origin. It had been whispered about that he had once been a mechanic, and worked with his hands, and he was horribly annoyed thereat. He certainly had been in business in his youth, he confessed, when these reports came to his ears; but, as he quickly discovered his true vocation to be "the Church," he had taken holy orders as soon as possible.

Now, Charles Pettifer had never really been in any sort of reputable business. His father was a vagabond, his mother an untidy, sleepy slattern, and all his relations more or less discreditable. He could not help that, you will say. Of course he could not; and a man is not a bit the worse for having once sold lucifers, or tinkled a muffin-bell in the street. But if, in after days, he chooses not only to ignore all the circumstances of his youth, but to speak largely of his paternal home, and to boast of being well connected, &c., &c., he finds himself in one unceasing dilemma, and he is always afraid of his antecedents being betrayed to his exceeding prejudice.

Mr. Pettifer had a good many relations, but he had managed to steer clear of all of them save this one sister, known to her own circle as Betsy Bratt. Betsy Bratt was now an elderly woman over fifty years of age; she was a widow, for Mr. Bratt had died suddenly in a midnight brawl, after a fortnight of hard drinking; and she got a living, such as it was, by keeping a very small huckster's shop, and letting lodgings to single men. "Single men

taken in and done for" was the notice printed on the dirty card which lay in the dirty window in company with half a dozen tallow candles, a few red herrings, a basket of suspicious-looking eggs, labelled "new laid," a bottle of castor oil, ditto of hair oil, a stale loaf or two, a glass jar filled with a popular sweetmeat known to juveniles as "bulls'-eyes," and a placard which proclaimed the delightful fact that here also you might purchase salts and senna, stationery, and soft soap! As for the single men, Mrs. Bratt did not care if they were married, provided they did not bring their wives with them, and never introduced them to her notice.

Mrs. Bratt lived in Denver Lane, a miserable alley out of a nasty back street in the lowest quarter of Woverham —a quarter famous for gutters, children, broken windows, and men and women who were singularly intimate with the police. Mr. Pettifer stepped into the so-called shop, really the kitchen, of the wretched tenement of which his sister was mistress, and, finding no one present, began to hammer on the board that served for counter. A tall, dark-eyed, wizened, but still sprightly woman stepped out of the "back parlour," to serve, as she supposed, her customer. She stopped short when she saw who wanted her, and cried our, "Lors! if it ain't you, now! Why, I was a thinkin' on ye this very mornin', and makin' up my mind as I'd come over to Braffle"—meaning Bradfield— "as it was to-morrer, if so be as you didn't turn up to-day. I'd soon find yer, though yer is so close about yer place."

Mr. Pettifer shuddered. That sentence revealed the secret of his visits to Wolverham. Betsy Bratt was a character, and she was sturdily determined not to be ignored by "her own flesh and blood"—her only brother in England; Mr. John Pettifer, five years older than Charles, being in the colonies under peculiar circumstances. And so a compact had come to be made between these two, if once or twice a year Charles would come to see Betsy, and bring her "a little present," Betsy would not go to see Charles, or proclaim her relationship to him. And bitterly ashamed as Charles was of the connection, he still found a certain satisfaction in being able to say exactly what he meant, and to tell Betsy, who was certainly a very clever woman, though vulgar and unprincipled, his

plans and schemes, and to ask for her advice, which was pretty sure to be good and useful in its kind.

"Well, I have been a long while this spell," said Mr. Pettifer, flinging himself on the only chair in the place, and speaking in quite a different tone and style from that to which his friends at Arleston were accustomed. "I've had trouble, Betsy."

"Trouble, have yer? Short o' browns and tanners?"

"Well! I'm never very flush in money, as you know; but this is a different sort of trouble: I've lost my poor wife."

"You don't look much like a widow-man; yer 'avent fretted yourself to an atomy anyhows."

"Still I have fretted, Betsy. But that's neither here nor there. All the fretting in the world won't bring her back again, and I'm very lonely."

"Say the word, an' I'll come and keep house for yer, my lad. I'm pretty well tired o' keepin' a shop what won't keep me, and it's a pity a body should be lonely."

"It wouldn't do, Betsy," said Mr. Pettifer, shaking his head; "we should both come to grief together."

"Well, I s'pose we should. You've chose to be a gentleman—leastways, a make-believe gentleman; and I've promised I won't put ne'er spoke in yer wheel as long as yer don't despise and neglect me, and as long as yer gives me the trifle agreed on, and I allus keeps my promises, though that's more than can be said for some folks, as think theirselves a nation better nor Betsy Bratt! And I shouldn't be 'appy in yer fine home if I come there. I should only be upsettin' of you continual, and doing myself no good neither. I'm best as I am; and the best you can do, my lad, is to go courtin' agen. You're barely forty yet, you knows. Get a wife with a lot of tin."

"That's just what I'm thinking of doing, Betsy, my lass."

"Well, I never! Trust a parson for not butterin' 'is bread for 'iself! though I never can feel right sure as yer a real out-and-out proper-made parson, not as I cares so as you keeps it up. Yer can wag yer tongue with the best on 'em, I'll warrant! But, come now, tell us all about it. Let's go into the parlour; there'll be no cus-

tomers come in this a'ternoon. I've got a drop o' Old Tom left, and I can fill yer a pipe, if you'd like it."

Mr. Pettifer politely declined the pipe; he was not much of a smoker at any time, and he was afraid of his sister's tobacco; but he accepted the gin and water which Mrs. Bratt mixed, aad set down before him. The brother and sister indulged in a comfortable, though by no means excessive, libation before the conversation was resumed. Mrs. Bratt lighted her short pipe, and puffed away. The room was very dark, for the only window was small, and never cleaned, and it had two of its six panes composed of brown paper instead of glass. Moreover, it looked into a little yard surrounded by high dead walls, so that even at noon, when the sun was shining, twilight prevailed in Mrs. Bratt's back parlour. It was so dark now at four o'clock in the afternoon of a bright May day that the two, seated not far apart, could not distinctly see each other's faces.

"Well, lad!" said Betsy, at length, after an extra pull at the pipe and the gin; "'ave yer found the gal, or be yer on'y lookin' about for one?"

"I've found the lady, Betsy, but I have not asked her."

"That don't matter, if she'll say 'yes' when you do arkse her."

"I flatter myse'f I have made *some* impression," replied Mr. Pettifer, in his genteelest Arleston style; "but the worst of it is, I don't particularly like her."

"What do yer want her for, then?"

"She is very, *very* rich, Betsy! She is rich beyond belief; and she's a godly woman, too, and discreet, and respectably connected."

"Which you *ain't!*"

"And I believe I should make good use of the money, Betsy. I doubt not I should be able to give an account of my stewardship when the Lord ——"

"Shut up that! Don't come the pious over me, Charley Pettifer, it's only waste of breath! Go on: is she old and ugly, and a scold?"

"She is younger than I am. She is not a beauty, but she is not—well, not repulsive-looking. As to temper, I should say she has got one of her own!"

"And so have you, Charley. Never fear her temper;

you'll be a match for her, I engage! Go in and win, my lad, if yer safe and sure there ain't no sly take-in about the tin. It won't do to go and be sold, yer know!"

"No fear of that! All Bradfield knows positively she is rich as rich; and it's all in her own power to do with and bequeath as she likes. But—" and Mr. Pettifer fortified himself with a good sip at his gin and water.

"But what?"

"She has a pretty niece—only seventeen or eighteen—the loveliest girl *I* ever saw, and worth fifty of the old aunt; and if she would make her the heiress, I don't know but that I would rather have the niece. There's nobody else to leave the money to, provided the aunt dies without children; but she's only thirty-seven, and she may marry somebody, if she does not marry me. I think it would be safest to marry the aunt, though the niece is enough to make a simpleton of any man, with her lovely face! What do you say, Betsy?"

"I say, leave the gal alone, Charley. Gals is dangerous; and this one, if she is not left heiress, may be left with just nothing at all. Besides, the aunt is only young, and she may live as long as yerself. Go in for the old gal, Charley—old maids is easy caught; only take care not to be done, no-ways."

"Trust me for that, Betsy!" And then the pair engaged in a long and earnest conversation, which we need not relate. Finally, it was agreed that Mr. Pettifer should take to wife, as soon as compatible with decency, Miss Lane, the heiress; and that Mrs. Bratt, on the receipt of three hundred pounds, should forego her brother's regular visits, and content herself ever afterwards with such intercourse only as should seem to him expedient. And Mr. Pettifer went back to Arleston and resumed his clerical attire, and his evangelical demeanour, and forthwith addressed himself to the courtship of Sarah Lane.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MISS LANE SETS UP HER CARRIAGE.

"ARE you going home with us to-night, Nora, or must you, without further delay, put in an appearance at 'The Woodlands'?" asked Gertrude Bethell as the express down-train bore them swiftly towards Bradfield. Already they had left behind them all the principal stations on the line; and now, as at full speed they flashed by little country platforms, and rustic waiting-rooms, and unimportant junctions, they could perceive on either hand signs of the district on which they were entering. The country grew flatter, the trees more stunted, the foliage more sparse; ugly red-brick houses dotted the landscape, which was one wide stretch of level meadow-land, broken by frequent hedges, and innumerable shallow, muddy streams, which in rainy seasons gave rather a swampy character to the locality. And even as Gertrude spoke they emerged from a long cutting, and beheld in all its native smokiness and squalor a large outlying suburb of Bradfield itself. Now came rows of small and shabby tenements, gas-works, railway carriage manufactories, narrow streams of Stygian blackness, railway arches, more and more streets, more and more houses, especially public-houses; rope-walks, brick-fields, churches, chapels—all well befouled with smoke, and all sordid and unpleasing to behold. There is not one redeeming feature in the aspect of Bradfield as you approach it by the London Railway, which passes through one of the dreariest, forlornest quarters of the town ere it reaches the famous Old Street Station.

Nora's heart sank within her as she saw the well-remembered landmarks which told her that her journey was accomplished, and her long season of happiness over. When Gertrude addressed her, she replied, "I will go home to *ma tante* at once, if you please; it has got to be,

so it had better be quickly. My very pleasant time has come to an end, and it is no use making little delays. If I went home with you now, it would seem like settling down with you again; and it would make it all the worse to-morrow, when at last I must depart."

"Nora is right," said Mrs. Bethell; "it is far wiser to brace one's-self to meet a change than to wait till it is forced upon one. Besides, Miss Lane knows that we return to-day, and she may reasonably feel hurt if Nora lingers with us to the last moment, instead of hastening to her."

"I am glad you think I am right," replied Nora, not, however, without a struggle to repress the rising tears. "I have been very happy, and I had no idea that *ma tante* would permit me so long to remain absent. It would seem ungracious, I think, if I did not go back to her immediately; and perhaps it will be better than I think. At any rate, 'The Woodlands' is my home, and I must try to make the best rather than the worst of it. How much nicer it is than Salamanca House, with that dreadful back sitting-room and the stupid brick walls I had to look at. I have a very pleasant room of my own now, and then I have my dear piano. Ah! it was so good of *ma tante* to give me that, and my music lessons, that I can excuse her many things. She deserves that I try to please her as far as I can. I cannot make myself like her, or believe what she believes, and that is what she wants, I am afraid; but I can refrain from vexing her in many little things, and I can be patient, and think of her many kind acts when she is very tormenting—when she has her 'moods,' you know—and I really do think she cannot help having fits of bad temper any more than I can help having toothache."

"Probably not now," said Dr. Bethell. "She has never been trained to self-control, and her religious teaching has been so defective that she really does not know the duty of cultivating an even temper. She is greatly to be pitied, for she must be continually unhappy: you must try to make great allowances for her, Nora, and you must do all you can to brighten her—only, you know, my dear, you will have to do it in her way, not in yours. If you really wish to benefit people, if you earnestly

desire to serve them in God's name, you must do it, not by running a tilt against their most cherished convictions, not by scorning their prejudices, but by falling in with all the good that is in their theory and practice, and, as far as conscience is not violated, ignoring the bad. As a rule, I do not think conscience often tempts people to be too lax when the shortcomings of others are concerned; the mischief rather is that poor '*conscience*' is made the excuse for a vast deal of uncharitableness, and self-assertion, and unchristian temper."

"All tickets ready!" sang out the man on the ticket platform, bringing Dr. Bethell's parting charge to an abrupt conclusion. "And quite as well, too!" he added to himself, as he searched in his waistcoat pocket for the half-dozen tickets he must surrender. "I don't believe in too much exordium, however rational, nor in too much good advice, however kindly and well-meant. People must use their own discretion, after all; and one person can never actually put himself in another person's place. I can no more legislate for Nora than Nora for me. In a case like this one can only give leading principles—going into detail does all the harm. No, I do not believe in too much '*talking to*' anybody; for if the 'anybody' has his senses about him, he is pretty sure to resent a great deal that, from sheer ignorance of facts as they precisely are, is pure impertinence; and if he have not the full possession of his senses, why, then it is so much breath wasted, and nothing else!"

A minute or two more and the train was in the station; and the first person Nora saw was her aunt, standing on the platform, looking anxiously into the carriages as they slowly passed. Nora was very glad, then, that she had quite made up her mind to go straight home to Arleston.

But, was it her aunt? Ah, yes! there was no mistaking *that* face! Whatever you might bring against Sarah Lane's personal appearance, you were obliged to confess that she was *striking-looking!* Her features were harsh, her expression stern, her whole mien and aspect unlovely and repelling; but there was that in her countenance which, having once seen, you could no more forget. Hers was a face which every one remembered, though I cannot say it was always or often a pleasant remembrance.

Why did Nora say to herself, as she caught sight of the familiar visage, "*Est ce que c'est ma tante, là? Vraiment?*" Nora had left her aunt still in mourning, and the lady, whom she at once recognised as Miss Lane, wore bright-coloured raiment. Nora herself still dressed in black and white, and in soft, silvery greys, pale delicate lilacs or *mauves*, and violets, the sort of *demi-deuil* of which a Frenchwoman knows how to avail herself. Sarah had a great deal of black in hand when Nora went away, and she meant to wear it out, she said: she had no idea of wasting her dresses, just because tyrant fashion declared that the days of mourning were well-nigh ended. But *now!* there was Sarah with pink flowers in her bonnet, and the bonnet of white *tulle*, or something of that sort, had pink strings! I am sorry to be obliged to state that Miss Lane wore a mauve muslin dress, and a shawl of nondescript hue, that was neither mauve nor pink, but something that was between the two. Her *toilette* set Nora's teeth on edge, and made her shiver.

But this was not the only change. There was something in her aunt's face which she had never seen before; an expression entirely new, and which puzzled her exceedingly. Nor was her surprise at all lessened when she received quite an affectionate embrace and welcome; there was a sort of effusion in Miss Lane's manner which bewildered her niece, and attracted the regard of the Bethells. What did it all mean? they pondered, as, having bade Nora adieu, they drove off to St. Oswald's Square.

"Now, Nora, we have all the luggage, have we not?" said Sarah, as the Bethells disappeared. "Make haste; the carriage is waiting, and the horses do not like standing."

The carriage! the horses! "Whose carriage; whose horses?" thought Nora, as she followed her aunt and the porter to the open side of the station, where the vehicles of all sorts were. And then she saw her trunks being conveyed to a very handsome close carriage, which was certainly awaiting some one's order. "Can you do with the large trunk on the box, Samuel?" asked Miss Lane of a portly individual, who seemed to have the two spirited quadrupeds well in hand.

Samuel said that he could; and, as the smaller packages

could be very well accommodated inside the carriage, the necessary arrangements were soon made, and the two ladies were on their way to Arleston, going through some of the worst haunts of Bradfield as the shortest route.

"Aunt, whose carriage is this?" asked Nora, when she could hold her tongue no longer.

"Mine, of course," was the prompt answer. "Whose did you think it was?"

"I did not know. You had no carriage when I left home in the spring."

"I had not had time then properly to organise my establishment, and I never do things in a hurry. It has been represented to me that I ought to keep a carriage of my own, and when I am once convinced of a duty I cannot rest till I have performed it. It is a great expense, for the carriage itself, though it cost a good round sum, is but a mere item in the whole. Here are the horses, first-class animals I am assured; but how they do eat! Their keep comes to more than mine and yours! Then there is the coachman, who wants good wages, besides sundry expenses that I cannot calculate, and which I never foresaw. The whole affair will not stand me in less than two hundred or two hundred and fifty pounds a year!"

"Will it not?" said Nora, fairly staggered. She could not understand her aunt's sudden extravagance. But it was very comfortable, rolling along the roads in an easy, luxurious carriage—far better than jolting about in a shabby hack conveyance, or being shaken and crushed in an omnibus. Nora, without much reflection, approved of the step her aunt had taken, and she said as much.

"I am not sure but that I have been too lavish!" said Sarah, rubbing her nose in a way that Nora knew denoted suppressed vexation. "My father never thought of setting up his carriage, and I am sure I never thought I should live to sit in a thing like this, bought with my own money, and drawn by my own horses. Very good horses, I am told they are, and I can see with my own eyes that they are handsome enough. I can always make my money of them if I like to sell them. Still, having your own equipage increases your cares as well as your outlay. I am not sure that I shall not repent it. And then one expense leads to another."

"But you are rich—everybody says how wealthy you are!" Nora ventured to say.

"Everybody had better mind his own business," answered Sarah, tartly. "People always exaggerate the riches of others; and pray, Nora, do not get the idea that I can afford anything. Because I have been betrayed into one act of extravagance, do not imagine I am ready to indulge in others. A large income has its drawbacks; there are so many demands upon one's purse. I could soon get through all my property if I chose to be reckless and wasteful. And you have cost me no small sum this year, I must tell you, Nora. Travelling and visiting always run away with a lot of money. You must be careful now you have come home."

"Indeed I will be," said Nora, earnestly.

There was something in her aunt's manner which might or might not prognosticate a storm, and she was most anxious to keep the peace. Also, taking into account her aunt's close, money-loving disposition, she felt that she had not been dealt with ungenerously during the summer, for Miss Lane would not allow the smallest of her travelling expenses to be defrayed by the Bethells. "Yes," she continued, "I must have cost you a good deal, I am afraid. It was very good of you to send me so much money. I tried to be careful, but somehow the sovereigns melted away. Well, I can be saving now; I shall not want a new dress till quite the winter."

"I think you may have one before then," and Sarah smiled a peculiar smile. What could it all mean? A carriage, and a coachman, and a fine pair of horses, and a dress that was not required! And, above all, the singular expression which came over her aunt's face when she spoke of the dress; Nora thought she blushed.

"Well," she continued, "I really will be careful, very careful now. How glad I shall be to touch the keys of my piano again. We had a piano in our lodgings at Hastings, but it was a miserable wiry thing, always getting out of tune, and such a bad action too. How is Rhoda?"

"Very well, and as saucy and independent as ever."

"She is a good servant though?"

"Or I should not keep her; yes, she does things

thoroughly; she never slights her work, and she is to be trusted. But I have thought more than once of parting with her; I don't like Dissenters in my house."

"Is that why you thought of parting with her?"

"Yes; I have not much else against her, and I often think she would be more comfortable in a Dissenting family. And, of course, I wish that my servants should attend St. Mildred's; Samuel does, and so does the cook I have engaged since you went away."

"Is Ann gone then?"

"Yes; she was not servant enough; Rhoda had too much on her hands, for nothing could be left to Ann; and then she had such a tongue, and she refused to go to St. Mildred's regularly. So I talked it over with Mary and Martha Grice, and came to the conclusion that I would have a good plain cook, if I could find one with an undeniable character; and just as I was beginning to think I should never get exactly what I wanted, Miss Gruesome Greenway sent me a woman who really suited. She cooks very well, and she does not waste. Also, she values her religious privileges."

"How does she get on with Rhoda?"

"Rhoda, unlike herself, says little about her. But I can see she does not like cook. Of course, while Ann was with me she was head-servant; now she is only second in the kitchen; I suppose she is jealous."

"I should not think Rhoda would be jealous," said Nora, thoughtfully. "What changes you have made while I have been away!"

Again Miss Lane blushed, or so Nora fancied, as she replied, "Yes, my dear, and—— and I intend making still greater changes in my household."

Nora was very glad to hear it; for any change she thought must be for the better. But she began to be afraid her aunt must be *fey*, as the Scotch call it, when people shortly before their death perform extraordinary actions. Yet she seemed well enough; in spite of the pink strings on the reddish-mauve shawl, which rested on the grey-lavender muslin, she was certainly in her best looks, which were by no means bad looks, when she was in a happy, contented frame of mind. And then Nora asked how the Misses Grice were, and how was Mr.

Salisbury, and how was Mr. Quaverette, her music-master? But she did not ask how Mr. Pettifer might be. "I will not think about him till I am obliged to see him and to hear him," she thought. "How I wish I might go to St. Gregory's, or to Carvary with Rhoda."

Presently said Sarah—"You do not inquire for your pastor, Nora."

"No," said Nora, feeling guilty; "how is he?"

"Pretty well; but he has been much depressed, living so much alone. His solitary rooms, and his solitary meals, at one time had such an effect upon him that he became really very unwell, and gave his congregation much cause for anxiety."

"Has he got over it now?"

"Yes." And Sarah was going to say something more, when who should appear on the pathway close by but the Rev. Charles Pettifer himself. Samuel, the coachman, drew up, and Mr. Pettifer came to the carriage door. "Very glad to have you home again," he said, after he had shaken hands with Nora; "we were thinking of coming after you, if your return was put off for another week. You are wanted at 'The Woodlands,' I can tell you!"

And he looked knowingly at Miss Lane, who blushed now, if she had never blushed before; that is, she reddened all over, to Nora's great amazement, and knitted her brows, and yet did not seem displeased.

"Well! I must not keep the horses standing," he observed; "and I have half-a-dozen letters to write for the evening's post."

"Shall I see you this evening?"

"Certainly! Unless you would rather be alone with Nora to-night? You will have a great deal to say to her."

"Yes—no!—I have not said much as yet; but you had better come as usual, Charles."

"All right! Ta-ta! I dare say I may be a little later, Sarah—for the man Jobson is coming up to speak to me after tea. How well and blooming our little girl looks!"

Nora could not speak; she could scarcely breathe, for consternation. How *dare* the man speak of her in that familiar style? "*Our* little girl," indeed! And what did he mean by saying he would not be later than usual? Did he

come every evening to "The Woodlands," then? And they called each other Charles and Sarah, just as if they were brother and sister, or——, and a sudden light, as unwelcome as it was unexpected, flashed on Nora's bewildered mind; for she was thinking, "just as if they were husband and wife!" But that could not be—at least, not yet—though it might be presently. And a great horror seized poor Nora; for, without exactly knowing why, she dreaded any close associations with Mr. Pettifer. In the first place, she did not, and could not, believe in him; and in the second place, she thought him a very disagreeable person, with whom she would not, if she could help it, have any dealings. And if he was to be her aunt's husband—her *uncle* he could never be—what then? Why, they would all live together, and she would have to see him, and hear him, and own his rule as master of the house, every day, and all day long. Surely, surely it could not be true—the elegant carriage, the prancing horses, her aunt in pink and mauve, and Mr. Pettifer, with sanctimonious leer and honied tones! It must be a dream, and she would awaken presently in the little white-curtained bed at Hastings, and hear the waves breaking along the shore, and see Gertrude already half-dressed, and spring up, wondering that she had slept so late and so heavily.

But, no! It was Bradfield, not Hastings, and she was as far away from the sea as she could be on British ground, and she was leaning against the luxurious blue damask cushions of a carriage, not against a common linen-covered bed-pillow. It was five o'clock in the afternoon, she was already within the precincts of Arleston, and she was wide awake, with her travelling satchel, her waterproof shawls strapped up, and her bonnet-case on the opposite seat before her. And Mr. Pettifer was coming to "The Woodlands" that evening, and her aunt and he would call each other Charles and Sarah!

"Nora, you seem to be half asleep," said Miss Lane presently; "what is the matter?"

"I was wondering whether I was really awake; it all seems so strange."

"Coming home ought not to seem strange, Nora. I hope you are not spoiled by too much liberty."

"I did not mean that it was strange to come h-

Arleston is not pretty, but I am glad to see it again; and I am very truly glad to see you, *ma chère tante.* But what means he, that Pettifer man, by calling you by your Christian name, and speaking as if every evening he came to visit you at 'The Woodlands'?"

"He does come to visit me every evening; and he calls me by my Christian name because he has every right to do so."

"Every right? Oh, *ma tante!*"

"Nora, for your age you are extremely stupid. I do not like forward, flippant girls, but you are eighteen, and it seems strange that you cannot at once understand how things are between Mr. Pettifer and myself."

Nora grew deadly pale. It was no dream, no ridiculous fancy of her own. "He is your *futur*, then?" she said, slowly; "you are his *fiancée?*"

"I am not quite sure what that means. I wish you would speak plain English. We are engaged to be married, if that is what you intend to say." And Sarah heaved a sigh of relief to think that now the truth was told.

"What is the matter with you, child?" for Nora was white to the lips; Miss Lane was afraid she was going to faint: and at the same time a terrible suspicion darted into her naturally suspicious mind—"What if Nora, so young and so beautiful, cared for him herself! What if *she* also were in love with the irresistible Charles? A more serious and uncomfortable complication of affairs could scarcely be imagined. And again Miss Lane demanded, and this time with all her natural acerbity of tone and manner, "What is the matter, Nora?"

"You take me by surprise, *ma tante.*"

"Engagements are not such very uncommon occurrences. Somebody or other is always going to be married."

"*Mais oui!* I mean yes; but one's aunt is not always going to be married! Oh, dear, what nonsense I am talking! Aunt, don't be angry, but I do not at all like Mr. Pettifer."

That was for the moment a comfort to Sarah. She never doubted Nora's word, and indeed there was sincerity in every tone. A little too much sincerity, thought Mr.

Pettifer's betrothed, as Nora, still pale, but rallying her spirits, went on, "*Ma tante*, forgive me, but I will say it, I do think Mr. Pettifer is not a good man, that is, not so good as he pretends to be. I think he pretends a great deal. I do, indeed. And he is not a gentleman."

"Nora! how dare you speak so of one who in a few weeks will be my husband? You have been with worldly people so long that you have learned to judge and to speak as they do. Once for all, understand that you are to render to Mr. Pettifer the same respect and submission which you pay—or rather, which you ought to pay—to me. Think what it will be to live in the same house with a pious, devoted clergyman of the Church of England."

"And do you love him, *ma tante?*" asked Nora, timidly.

"Of course I do, or I should not be going to marry him."

"I hope, then, he loves you, *ma tante!*"

"There is no doubt about it. He has never truly loved before."

"But he has been married before."

"Ah, yes! many men marry in their youth, and make frightful mistakes. They cannot discern between mere likings and fancies, and the love which is for life—the one love, which comes only once in the life of any man or any woman. Then, when it is too late, they find out the error Charles told me, the other day, of a clergyman he knew, who has lately married for the fourth time, and, though he is past sixty, he finds out that he never truly loved before."

"The more shame to him! He must be a bad man to have married three women, one after another, and cared not truly for any one of them."

"Nonsense! he did care; he had a very proper and husbandly affection for them, no doubt. But this woman whom he has married now, is, he says, his second self; she perfectly accords with him, she is as his own soul, and with her he enjoys a spiritual and intellectual communion, such as in his previous marriages he never even dreamed of."

"And perhaps this lady will also die, and as he is so much given to matrimony, he will take unto himself yet another wife; and she may accord with him still more

perfectly than this one. Then he will say his dear fourth was very sweet and good, but his beloved fifth is still sweeter and better, and she is the only woman whom he has yet truly loved! I like not the man of many marriages."

"Nor I; but many men, many good and saintly men, burning and shining lights in the Church of God, have married several times. And to marry a second time may be even a man's duty, for an unmarried clergyman is always at a disadvantage. Now, let us say no more about it; but when your uncle—you may as well call him so at once, and get into the way of it—when he comes presently, I shall expect you to behave to him as a niece should."

"*Ma tante*, I will be as respectful as I can, and I will try for your sake to like him; but I am not sure that I can call him *mon oncle!*—certainly I cannot until he becomes your husband. *Ma tante*, knows he how much money you have?"

Miss Lane made no reply; she never encouraged young people in impertinence; and so the conversation closed.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

NORA'S UNPACKING.

"WELL, Miss Nora, so we're to have a wedding?" said Rhoda, when, after tea, she was helping her young mistress to unpack. Mr. Pettifer had duly arrived, and Nora had said all that was proper, though she wondered how far she had spoken truth when she ended; but Miss Lane was satisfied, and Mr. Pettifer was greatly relieved, for he had rather anticipated an unpleasant scene with the young lady. And now the lovers were alone in the drawing-room, "holding sweet communion." Probably the Rev. Mr. Pettifer believed that "there's nothing on earth like

making love, save making hay in fine weather." And he was doing both, lucky man! the latter occupation being of course metaphorical.

"When is it to be, do you know, Rhoda?"

"Some time next month; it's the first week in September now, isn't it? It will be quite early in October, I believe. Have you seen the wedding dress, Miss Nora?"

"No. Is it bought?"

"It's bought and it's made; the mistress never likes things being done at the last moment. It's silver-grey moire antique, trimmed with lovely white lace; and you are to have a lavender silk, and a white bonnet of some sort."

"Am I to be *demoiselle d'honneur?*"

"What is that, Miss Nora?"

"I do not know how they call it in English. In France the young ladies who attend the bride are said to be her *demoiselles d'honneur.*"

"It is bridesmaids you mean."

"I suppose so. Am I to be bridesmaid?"

"Of course you are, Miss Nora. And there is another bridesmaid wanted; there must be *two.*"

"Do they go in pairs—like shoes and tall footmen, then!"

"Yes; it would look mean for a lady to have only one bridesmaid, and she the richest lady in Bradfield, to say nothing of Midlandshire. Now, if I get married one bridesmaid would be proper for me; but, then, I am only a servant, and I should not wish to be above my station. If you get married you ought to have four at least; and, properly speaking, *six!* Miss Elphinstone who was married last month had eight bridesmaids, and most lovely they looked; four in pale blue and white, and four in pale pink and white, the white all the sweetest *ruchings.* They were married at the parish church, and I asked the mistress if I might go, for my sister Dinah is young ladies'-maid to the Miss Elphinstones, you see, and I knew all about the wedding for weeks before it came to pass. And the mistress, she went too; I suppose she thought it would be a good opportunity to take a lesson. I didn't know then that she was going to be married herself, though I could see



"He's a tyrant, Miss Nora, that's what he is, if a tyrant ever lived. He's that arrogant in his church that people can't abide him; and the rest of the clergy don't speak well of him. Your poor old grandpa was a regular slave-driver, if all the tales the mistress and Mrs. Pegg tell be true; and this Mr. Pettifer is one of the same sort, only he's got more learning, and he's been mixed up more with the world, and knows he must keep up a decent sort of behaviour, or he'll be nowhere, and that won't suit him, for he has a grand opinion of himself, and thinks he is somebody of consequence. But he has a temper of his own, and I know he's pigheaded, and he always thinks he is in the right, let who will be wrong. And there's the mistress—*we* know she's always right—let her tell the tale, and she never gives in to anybody, and she will have every little thing exactly as she likes it. Bless us! she is not content with us doing what she bids us, but we must feel in our hearts that her bidding is quite the right thing, and that we are favoured in the doing it. As I said to her one day, when she'd gone and harrowed me up like —'Ma'am,' I said, 'I'll do what you tell me, because I am your servant, but I can't *think* you are right, and my thoughts are my own.' Now when these two who are so much alike get tied up together, won't there be scrimmages, that's all!"

"Perhaps there will be, Rhoda; but that is no affair of ours. *Ma tante* is old enough to choose for herself. And now let us make the best of it! Perhaps Mr. Pettifer will turn over a new leaf when he is married; perhaps it will be better for him to have some one not so meek and gentle as that sweet wife of his was. Let us hope it will all be for good, Rhoda; and now let us talk no more about it, except pleasantly. See! I have brought you a pretty set of collar and cuffs from London, and this apron was for Ann. I do not care about giving it to the new cook, whom I have not seen."

"I know where Ann is, Miss Nora, if you'll entrust the apron to me. Thank you kindly, miss, for your beautiful present. I never had such a collar and cuffs in my life. I shall wear them on the wedding day. This lace might be real, it looks so well."

"It is real, Rhoda. There is only a little bit of it, but

I thought you would like it good. I could have got a showier set for half what this one cost. But I knew your love for the real thing. I knew you would prefer a plain, genuine thing to a fine make-believe that would neither wash nor wear."

"Thank you, Miss Nora; thank you for that, even more than for the present, which I shall set rare store by. It is so pleasant to be understood. Yes; I had rather have half a real thing than a whole sham one! I never could take to make-believes; though I have got a brother-in-law in the gilt-ornament trade, and he do make the loveliest brooches and earrings. Only the other day he showed me a beauty of a brooch that was only four-and-sixpence! 'And you couldn't tell it,' says he, 'from a five-pounder, unless you was in the business!' 'But how about the wear of it, Ben?' says I. 'If I wear it every day for six months how will it look then?' 'Why, like what it is, Rhoda,' says he; 'like a piece of *brass!*' And he gave a good laugh. And there's a many things in life, thinks I, like those gilt brooches; 'all is not gold that glitters,' and what pleases only the eye don't wear the best. Thank you very kindly, Miss Nora, for my first bit of real lace, perhaps the only bit I shall ever have; and thank you still more for the compliment you've paid me. And I'll take the apron to Ann, if you please; she is living at No. 3, Bellevue, and gives satisfaction, she says. She meant well did Ann, but she and the mistress never got on; it was best she should try a new service, and she had learned a deal with us."

"And do you like your new fellow-servant, Rhoda?"

"The cook, Miss Nora? No, I don't; but please not to ask me anything about her, for I am afraid I do not judge her fairly. It is so hard to think well of a person you do *not* like. I am obliged to say some verses of the thirteenth chapter of 1st Corinthians, several times in the day, just to keep myself quiet. I had rather not talk about cook, if you'll forgive my saying so, Miss Nora, but she does not behave badly to me, and I am quite content to be second in the kitchen. I feel less responsibility, and I am great friends with Charlotte next door."

"At Mr. Draper's."

"No, at Mr. Stanley's. Did not the mistress tell

you? My minister, bless him, has taken Wood Cottage."

"Mr. Stanley, the pastor of Carvary?"

"The very same, Miss Nora. Mistress, she did not half like it, having a Dissenting minister, you know, for a tenant. Those Evangelicals, that call themselves so, though they make such a loud fuss about charity, and say, 'dear brother This,' and 'dear brother That,' on public platforms, are always spiteful towards Dissenters in private life. We Dissenters used to trust them, but we don't now; though if they were only half honest they would have to be Dissenters themselves: and it is for our honesty they hate us, for hate us they do in their hearts. Better a sharp spear that you know will thrust you through if you lean upon it, than a fine polished crutch that will snap the moment you trust your weight to it. Says Mr. Stanley, they, the self-styled Evangelicals, are afraid of us, and so they want to conciliate us; but they would like to root Nonconformity out of the land if they could, which, thank God, they can't."

"Why, Rhoda, what a Dissenter you are!"

"Of course I am, Miss Nora; what's the good of being half anything? it isn't in me to be a go-between. I hope I am not bitter; but mistress and Mr. Pettifer between them made me a Dissenter, though my own mother used to go to Carvary; and I like to feel that where she, that is in glory now, sat, and prayed, and drank of the cup of blessing, I sit now, and pray, and learn, and take the supper of the Lord. But it will be all one some day, and the good Lord knows them that are His, in whatever communion they are. He has His people even among the Romanists, don't you think, Miss Nora?"

"I am sure He has, Rhoda. I have known many good people, who are, and always will be, in the Church of Rome. It seems all right to them, and they love Christ. Oh, dear! how I have seen the poor women come into the churches—for churches are always open in my country—and fall down at one of the altars, and pray, and pray till the tears dropped down. I know they prayed to our dear Lord, for one could not weep while one prayed to a saint or to an image, at least, I think not; and then I have seen them pick up the market-basket and go away, looking so

rested and so peaceful, as one does when one has been telling God all one's troubles and temptations. It would be very dreadful if there were no Christian Roman Catholics, for there are millions of Romanists in the world always—far more than there are of Protestants—and it would indeed be sad if among them were none who truly loved and served the Lord. But you were telling me that Mr. Stanley had come to be our next-door neighbour?"

"Yes; he took Wood Cottage from Midsummer Day, and mistress was glad enough to let it, for she had had it done up beautifully, and the garden fresh planted out, and then you know she has a great horror of an empty house on either hand, though why, it is difficult to say, since neither Mr. Stanley's nor Mr. Draper's joins us, except as far as the gardens go. So, in spite of his being a Dissenter, she was pleased to let him have the house; but she had drawn up what she calls an 'agreement,' to bind him down to a lot of things, in case he wanted to go from his word, which I told her he never would do, being as honourable a gentleman as ever wore shoe leather, to say nothing of his being a Christian minister. I'd rather trust him than that Pettifer, any day!"

"Hush, Rhoda! Remember, you are to speak respectfully of Mr. Pettifer, or not at all. He will be your master soon."

Rhoda made a face. "I'll try to," she said. "It's only what's right, I know; but my tongue is such an unruly member. To go back to Mr. Stanley, though: he signed his agreement, all quite pleasant, and mistress she said when he was gone, 'He seems quite the gentleman; I should not have known him from a clergyman.' 'And isn't he a clergyman?' I asked. 'No,' says mistress; 'he is a minister, and that is all. There are no clergy out of the Church of England.' That seemed funny, but I thought a little, and then I asked her if there were none in the Church of Rome, and she said, 'Yes; that apostate Church has proper orders, although it has fallen into error. The Romish priests are clergymen, but your ministers are only ministers or pastors.'"

"It does not matter, Rhoda. If I were a minister I would sooner be called a pastor than a clergyman. Mr. Stanley is not married, is he?"

"No, he is not; and till lately he has lived in lodgings; so now people say he is going to bring home a wife. And the Carvary people are none so pleased, for there are ever so many young ladies there that they think he might have chosen."

"But he could not have chosen them all."

"Of course not. It is quite as well as it is; and, after all, I am not sure that he is going to be married, for he has got his sister, Miss Annie Stanley, to live with him. She will be a nice companion for you, Miss Nora, if the mistress will be agreeable. She is about twenty, I am told, and she is so sweet spoken."

"I should like to know her very much: there are scarcely any young ladies at St. Mildred's; there are the Miss Stampaways, but I do not much like them."

"They are not your sort, Miss Nora; those loud-voiced, giggling, fine misses. But our Miss Annie is a real lady, quiet, and modest, and as good as gold."

"How am I to be introduced, Rhoda?"

"It will come about somehow, you will see, Miss Nora. It would be quite a shame for two such young ladies to live next door to each other and not be intimate, and the Miss Bethells are so far away. Your aunt's friends are all old maids, like herself."

"She will not be an old maid long."

"Well, I suppose she will not! She has been counted an old maid so long, that one can't think of her as a married woman, which she will be, of course, when she comes back from church with Mr. Pettifer. How odd it will be to have a man about the house. Old Lane—I beg your pardon, Miss Nora, it comes so pat to call him what all the neighbourhood did—was as good as nobody to me, for he never came out of his room, except when I cleaned it once a week; and I never set eyes on him till he lay adying. So I don't know what it is to have a master, you see; I wonder whether I shall like it."

"I think we had better give up the question of liking the change, and just bring our minds to make the very best of it. And did you really *never* see my grandpapa till he was dying?"

"I never did; but I heard him often enough: he used to thump with his stick when he wanted anything. And if

identify them. The old man, who was the only person who could have sworn to them, never spoke again, never was sensible. It was a clever trick, their locking the mistress in the back part of the house."

"I suppose they thought there was much of money and valuables in the house? Thieves never come without knowing what they are after, I have heard say."

"All the neighbourhood knew that your grandpa was very rich, though how rich nobody knew till he was dead. There was a bad neighbourhood very near to Salamanca House—all that part of the town has been going down for years, though I've heard my father say that when he was a boy the gentlefolks had grand houses in St. Oswald's Square, and in Bramble Lane. I know it was rumoured that old Lane kept untold riches in a strong box under his bed; and more than once I was *asked* if I had ever seen any of the miser's wealth."

"What did you say?"

"It was easy to tell the truth, for I never saw any gold or silver, except what the mistress had in her housekeeping purse, and that was little enough. I don't believe he ever gave her more than a sovereign at a time, and she had to make the most of it too. There were a few silver spoons, not many, and a pair of tall old silver candlesticks, but I did not know but what they were plated. Then there was the mistress's cornelian brooch, and her coral ring, and a few other things. It was easy to say I never saw any signs of money nor valuables about the house. But there *was* lots of money in the house, Miss Nora, pounds and pounds, and things that I knew nothing about; the old man liked to feel and finger his money; and so he kept hoards of sovereigns and rolls of bank-notes by him. There would have been booty enough, if only mistress had not been too much for them, the rascals. And, Miss Nora, there's more money in this house than ought to be in it, I'm thinking; and there's a good deal of plate now, as you know. But that would not matter, if mistress did not barricade the doors so of a night; it's like asking thieves to come—it's as good as saying, 'There's something here worth your coming for.'"

"You mean her putting the fire-irons and the old tea-trays against the doors? I wish she would not do that.

It is so very foolish, and just as if she did not believe that there was any good God to take care of her. But people outside the house do not know what is done inside it; I know you never tell; and I never spoke of it to any one but Mrs. Bethell, and she desired me never to mention it to any one. For if it got known, she said, we should be sure to be attempted."

"It is known, though! For they were laughing about it at the baker's down Willow Bank. I never breathed a word, but Ann has a ready tongue, though she means no harm; and then, there's the charwoman, and that upholstering woman that stayed here two nights, over the new bed-furniture. I know she had her thoughts, when she saw the poker, and the tongs, and the shovel set up in the hall, and the big old tea-tray against the scullery-door. And she asked me if the mistress was all here?"

"All here! *Always* here, you mean?"

"No, she touched her forehead; she meant quite right in her mind. But one good thing will come out of the wedding; there will now be a man in the house, and that is always a protection. There! he is going away—no, there is the bell for prayers; *he* does the prayers now every night, and I wish he would not do them extempore, as he calls it, for he has not the gift."

CHAPTER XXXV.

HASTE TO THE WEDDING!

THE preparations for the marriage went on vigorously, for new dresses and new everything was the order of the day. Of course, if you set up a stylish carriage and a fine pair of horses, you must set up a good many more etceteras, if you do not wish to appear ridiculous. And Mr. Pettifer somehow had an idea of what was required in a "thoroughly genteel establishment." And Sarah, too, found out that her money accumulated inconveniently on her hands, and she did not even miss a few hundreds when she had spent them. I must say she always took good care to have value received for her money, though, like all such clever people, she was very often "penny wise and pound foolish," and in her endeavours to save a little she wasted a great deal.

There was some trouble about a second bridesmaid, for Miss Lane could not think of any young lady as a companion for Nora. As Rhoda had said, there were so very few young ladies at St. Mildred's, and Sarah herself had not made many friends at St. Oswald's. Nora suggested one of the Bethells, and at length, after some hesitation, it was decided that Fanny should be requested to officiate.

"We have not many relations between us," said Sarah, one evening to her lover, when Nora was present.

"So much the better, my dear Sarah," said Mr. Pettifer, whose arm encircled the slim waist of his betrothed. "There will be none to intermingle with our joy; we shall be all the world to each other; we two who are one, and our dear child Nora."

I am afraid the "dear child" felt anything but affectionately towards her intended uncle at that moment. They had had more than one little passage-at-arms already. Only the night before an interesting question

had been settled. Mr. Pettifer, his wooing for that evening being concluded, had risen to depart, and he had affectionately embraced his bride, Nora discreetly looking another way. Then came Nora's own leave-taking. She had been bending down to pet her cat, and when she lifted her head she looked, as her "uncle" thought, most lovely, most exquisitely charming. He was right, too; Nora's beauty had wonderfully developed during the months of her absence; to her natural grace she had added that easy self-possession which only association with high-bred people can induce. Her features were more formed, her sweet violet eyes more lustrous, her exquisite bloom more delicate, her whole countenance more expressive. Even Sarah was obliged to own to herself that her niece was "beautiful exceedingly."

She lifted her lovely head, and with Pussy purring in her arms, she turned to say "Good-night" to Mr. Pettifer. What evil sprite possessed him that he could not quietly shake hands and go away? "May I not have a kiss?" he said in dulcet tones, while the cat purred an accompaniment to the bland request. "Uncles always kiss their nieces, you know! and I am uncle in all but name."

As indeed he was, for it had come to the week before the wedding. And without more ado he was about to take Nora in his clerical arms, and imprint upon her sweet lips a chaste, avuncular salute.

Was it so chaste? Was it strictly avuncular? It was Mr. Pettifer's one weak point, not taking into account his extraordinary vanity and self-appreciation, that he felt all too keenly the force of female charms. He was too susceptible; only poor Ruth, dear soul, never guessed it. And he had long been convinced that, of all lovely girls, his *quasi*-niece was the very loveliest.

But Nora stepped back, and the clerical arms embraced empty air. She drew herself up like a young empress. There she stood, tall and lithe, blooming, fresh, and fair as Hebe, and majestic as Queen Juno. The rich damask suffused her cheek, her deep eyes flashed, her ruby lips curved themselves into a bewildering, disdainful smile, as she answered, as quietly as if she had been asked to take a potato, "I thank you; I like not to kiss the gentlemen."

"But," urged the foolish man, "*I* am surely an exception." And again he advanced towards her, while again she eluded the unwelcome embrace. His look, his tone, his set purpose, his whole demeanour exasperated her. Kiss *him!* No, never! Nora would much sooner have gone into the kitchen and kissed Samuel, the grave, portly coachman, had she been compelled to choose between the two. She threw back her proud young head, and waved him away. "I will not be kissed by you, Mr. Pettifer," she said, with an ominous light in her eyes—her lips quivering with the anger she could not quite suppress. "I am your wife's niece; but that permits you not to take liberties. Please to understand now, and always, that there is no tie between you and me which can warrant the smallest familiarity. I shall not bear it."

And Nora clenched her small hand, and bit her red lips. If he had presumed to touch her, I am afraid she would have used that little hand in self-defence.

"Fie! fie! Nora!" said Miss Lane—"making such a fuss about nothing! Playing the coquette does not become you. I am ashamed of you."

"But I am not ashamed!" retorted Nora, too angry now to be afraid of her aunt. "Me—I am not coquette! No man except my father ever kissed my lips—I feel his last kiss now! And no man except he is to be my husband, ever shall kiss me! It is a shame for a young girl to be kissed by strange men."

"Undoubtedly," replied Miss Lane; "I should be as shocked as you can be at the smallest approach to indecorum. But your uncle is not a strange man; he merely wished to acknowledge the bond of relationship which in a few days will subsist between you. He proffers the kiss of kindness, of fatherly affection, and you behave like a stage actress. Never mind, Charles, do not trouble yourself about her; a proud, stuck-up, heartless minx!"

"Then I am not to be favoured?" persisted Charles.

"No," said Nora, decisively; "I have said it—I say it again—I kiss you not." And with the air of a young duchess, Miss Nora Lane swept out of the room, and Mr. Pettifer was fain to be defeated. He never quite forgave Nora for his humiliation.

And Sarah, though very angry with her niece—so angry

that she sulked all the next day, and would have sulked on and on had not Nora's services been imperatively needed —thought in her own secret soul that it was quite as well that Charles and Nora should *not* be on kissing terms.

And so the days passed, and Sarah's maiden life drew to its conclusion. To do her justice, she loved her Charles as much as a person so naturally self-centred and so habitually selfish could love, and something deeper than pride would have been hurt had aught intervened to prevent the marriage. Nora's fine instinct told her that her aunt's affection for Mr. Pettifer was the real thing, so far as it went; and it was genuine, at least; it was gold, though mixed with a good deal of alloy.

What Mr. Pettifer's affection for his bride might be remained an open question. Mr. Salisbury treated him with ceremonious politeness, and he told Sarah, without any circumlocution, that she was making a fool of herself.

"Am I then so old, so ugly, so repulsive that I must be sought for my money, and not for myself?" asked Sarah, indignantly.

"By no means," replied Mr. Salisbury. "You are not old, you are not ugly, and you *can* make yourself very agreeable; but Mr. Pettifer is not the man to wed you out of pure disinterestedness. However, I have taken all possible care for you, more than you thank me for at present, and your father's will ties every penny upon you. Your husband may spend your income—you cannot keep that from him—you refused the settlement I proposed; but he cannot touch the principal, unless you are foolish enough to play into his hands."

"I am perfectly satisfied," replied Sarah, with a grand air, or rather with an air which she intended should be grand, but which was only grim. "I am surely old enough to choose for myself, and I know what I am doing better than any one can tell me. I have the most perfect confidence in my future husband as a man of most eminent piety, of learning, and of family.

Sarah's wedding-day was cold and bleak—a regular misty, chilly October day. They were married at the parish church, for St. Mildred's was not yet licensed for weddings. The bridegroom looked very silly, and the bride looked stiff and awkward. The Misses Grice cried

without knowing why; Nora looked sad and lovely; Fanny pretty and piquante, and extremely amused. Laura, who was not invited to the wedding, was in the gallery, taking mental notes as the bridal procession came up the aisle, and as the ceremony proceeded. I am afraid she made some very impertinent comments; and, running against the bridesmaids afterwards in the porch, she had the audacity to ask Nora, "What made your aunt marry that dreadful snob? Of all snobs, clerical snobs are the most detestable."

The breakfast, which assumed a semi-religious character —"a sort of prayer-meeting in a worldly frame of mind," Fanny called it—being over, the happy couple departed. The servants had provided themselves with the customary old shoes, but they were forbidden to conform to a silly worldly custom; so not a shoe was thrown, as Mr. and Mrs. Pettifer drove away from "The Woodlands" to spend their honeymoon in Paris, which neither of them had ever visited. Sarah, indeed, had never even seen London; Mr. Pettifer had once or twice been up for the May Meetings; but he had hitherto never left his native shores. As neither of them spoke French, Nora wondered how they would manage. She had done her best to coach them up in a few common sentences, and Mr. Pettifer had bought a phrase book, in which the pronunciation of the words was given. He had no fears; they would do capitally, he was certain. And he bade Arleston adieu in a state of radiant good humour. He might have been a little less pleased had he known that Mrs. Bratt, with two of her Wolverham friends, had witnessed the ceremony of his marriage, and that Mrs. Bratt had audibly proclaimed her relationship to himself.

"But she ain't no chicken, nor no beauty," said Betsy, in reference to her new sister-in-law. "He's bin and married her for her tin, in course, and he must put up with want of good looks, and with want of good temper, too; for if she's not a regular worrit and a downright wixen, my name ain't Betsy Bratt! The gal is a prutty creetur, an' no mistake! I wur arf afraid he'd go and get spliced to her, and she ain't got ne'er an 'apenny, bless you! Men is such fools; pertikler the middle aged 'uns, and the widow-men!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE ZION CIRCLE.

MR. AND MRS. PETTIFER were to be absent a month; but the weather not being quite propitious, and certain other drawbacks to their enjoyment arising, they wrote to say they would return a week earlier than they had intended. Nora was not much gladdened by the news, for she and Fanny Bethell had had what the Americans call "a good time," and she had rather liked the dignity of keeping house, and presiding as hostess. Martha and Mary Grice looked in upon the girls occasionally, and twice Miss Gruesome Greenway, a spinster of ripe years, and it was reported at St. Mildred's "an experienced Christian," came to offer her services, or counsel, or anything else Miss Lane might require. For now, of course, Nora took rank as "Miss Lane," *vice* Sarah Pettifer, promoted. Now, on two Sunday evenings since the departure of the bridal pair, Fanny and Nora had attended St. Olave's, and they were debating whether on the ensuing Sunday evening they should venture to go to Carvary; when Miss Gruesome Greenway was announced.

After the usual inquiries and remarks, Miss Greenway—first clearing her throat and sniffing at a funny little smelling-bottle—observed, "My dear, I noticed that you were not at church last Sunday evening. It was such a pity, for we had a most delightful discourse from Mr. Small—all about the candlesticks, you know."

"The candlesticks!" said Nora, much surprised; "how could he preach about candlesticks?"

"It was about the golden candlesticks in the Bible, of course, my dear; the candlesticks that Solomon made, or was it Moses? I am ashamed to say I forget which of them it was! And about the seven candlesticks that St. John saw in the Revelation, not about common house-

hold-candles, certainly; though I suppose even those could be spiritualised, and made the channel of some savoury truth, for to the spiritual in heart all things are spiritual, you know." And Miss Greenway quite believed that she was quoting Scripture.

"I am so sorry you missed it," she continued, seeing that Nora was not going to speak; "it was so very interesting and so calculated to arouse young people to a sense of their sins. Why didn't you come, Miss Lane?"

"Because I went—Fanny Bethell and I—to hear Dr. Burrowes."

"It was most imprudent of you. What will your aunt say when she hears of your wandering about the town in the dark; for, of course, you would not use the carriage on a Sabbath evening? It is most unfitting that young ladies unaccompanied should go roaming to distant churches, especially for the evening service."

"But we were not unaccompanied, Miss Greenway; Miss Martha Grice was good enough to take charge of us."

"Surely you must know that Martha Grice is not a proper person to undertake such a responsibility?"

"Not a proper person?" echoed Nora, feeling rather angry. "Why not, Miss Greenway?"

"She is herself unmarried, and therefore not qualified to chaperone young single ladies. Only a married lady can chaperone girls."

Nora looked incredulous, and Fanny turned away to stir the fire, but Miss Greenway saw the reflection of a smile on her face in the large mirror on the chimney-piece.

"Indeed," she resumed, "that is our English custom; our sober, prudent, proper English etiquette! I dare say it is quite different where you come from. Women are always—what shall I say?—well, very *free* in Popish countries, particularly in France, as I have heard."

"Indeed, you are much mistaken! girls in France have no liberty at all. A French girl is even never permitted to remain an instant alone with the man to whom she is on the point of marriage. I had more freedom, because my papa insisted on it, but our old servant Louison used to watch me as if I were a State criminal. I think the English way is very nice, not too strict and yet sufficiently

particular, though I had no idea that a woman wanted a chaperone as long as she remained unmarried."

"It is so. A single lady always requires protection."

"Dear me. I wonder if I shall be better able to protect myself when I am married than I am now? If I were married, Miss Greenway, could I chaperone *you?*"

"Yes, certainly. A married woman, however young, if she be discreet, may chaperone unmarried women of any age."

"I should have thought after thirty one might chaperone one's self. *Ma tante* did, I know."

"Mrs. Pettifer is singularly strong-minded. All women are not gifted as she is. Besides, a very rich woman, like your aunt, can always do very much as she chooses. I dare say if she went down the Broad Road on all-fours instead of on her two feet, the people would wonder; but when it came to be known who it was, they would only regard it as an amiable eccentricity on her part. Money permits a person to do almost anything."

Miss Greenway spoke with some acerbity. Till the advent of Miss Lane she had been the wealthiest and most honoured member of St. Mildred's congregation; and as such she held her own, and ruled with mild yet dignified sway over the sewing meetings, and tea meetings, and committee meetings, in which the ladies of St. Mildred's delighted. When Sarah came all this was changed. She became "leading lady" of the community; and Mr. Pettifer himself—inconstant man—though he still smiled sweetly on the well-endowed Miss Gruesome Greenway, reserved his confidences and his personal friendship for the fabulously rich Sarah Lane. And when poor Ruth died, Miss Greenway had her own thoughts. Excepting Nora and the Misses Grice there was not a lady of any age in the congregation who did not immediately begin to ponder the interesting question of Mr. Pettifer's second marriage, and to indulge in the still more interesting pastime of calculating her own chances of promotion. From Miss Gruesome Greenway herself, of uncertain age, down to Miss Henrietta Stampaway, of a certain age—to wit, sixteen-and-a-half—they all secretly hoped to be chosen by their pastor as mistress of his home, queen of his affections, and clergywoman of St. Mildred's. And

there was not one of them but would have cheerfully beaten Miss Lane when the engagement was formally announced had such pleasant little diversions been permissible to Christian ladies of decided evangelical sentiments.

Miss Greenway stayed, and gave Nora and Fanny a little more good advice, and denounced Dr. Burrowes as a blind leader of the blind, and hinted broadly that there were other ministers in the town more heterodox even than the rector of St. Olave's, and that "itching ears," especially in young people, were much to be reproved, till the girls heartily wished her away, and Nora began to be afraid that she should be obliged to ask her to dinner. She rose at length to take her departure, and then, in a sort of post-script to her farewells, she invited the young ladies to come and take tea at her house that evening, and to join a small select missionary working-party of which she was patroness, and which she intended to keep entirely to herself, and under her own sole management. Mrs. Pettifer might become superintendent of the girls' school, and president of all the feminine societies, for that could not well be hindered; but this little pet society of her own she determined to hold in her very own grasp, and even to fight for it if necessary.

Nora begged to be excused. Fanny had a cold, and must not be out in the night air while it lasted, and of course her guest could not be left alone. Of course not, Miss Greenway quite understood that; and, if people would go into hot, thronged churches, where the Gospel was not preached, on chill October evenings, they must expect to catch bad colds—*and worse*. Lungs were certainly of importance, but souls were much more so!

In which dictum the girls quite agreed. And, to their infinite relief, Miss Greenway really said "Good-bye," without pressing them any further to join the "Zion Circle" that afternoon; the fact being that she did not want them, only it seemed so strange not to ask them. For Miss Greenway meant to have a very select working-party on this occasion, that she might freely discuss Mr. Pettifer's marriage, and she issued her invitations accordingly.

Miss Greenway had a sort of craze about the Jew

that she understood much about them, but she had in her younger days been associated with people who talked incessantly about Jerusalem and Palestine, and were particularly fond of interpreting prophecy as it related to the lost tribes, and to the restoration of Israel. When "orphaned"—that was the way she always put it—at the tender age of forty-seven, she found herself very well off, and at once determined to take her place in religious society, and become a leader in whatever congregation she should unite with. She took a nice house at Arleston, and looked about her, and went the round of all the churches within walking distance, and finally decided upon the Episcopal Chapel, as it was then called, of which Mr. Pettifer was chaplain. She was received with open arms, for she professed herself in raptures with her pastor, who "preached the pure Gospel more purely" than any one else in Bradfield, or for miles around! She was naturally open-handed, and she gave largely wherever it seemed expedient to her to give; she joined all the societies, and gave them both her time and her money pretty freely. And it was chiefly owing to her exertions that the dark old dungeon, yclept "Arleston Episcopal Chapel," was pulled down, and the airy, so-called Gothic church of St. Mildred's erected in its stead. She moved heaven and earth to get Mr. Pettifer inducted as regular incumbent; she gave subscriptions and she collected them, and organised a system of general canvas; she went herself from house to house, and from parish to parish; she even condescended, though it was against her principles, to call upon the most wealthy and influential Dissenters and solicit their aid; and it was with no small exultation that she—Anna Maria Gruesome Greenway—laid the corner-stone of the new church of St. Mildred's one sunshiny morning, in the presence of Mr. Pettifer, who gallantly attended upon her, and handed her the silver trowel and the mallet; and surrounded by at least half the clergy of Bradfield, and a goodly proportion of the West-end laity.

It was a proud day for Miss Gruesome Greenway, and a day of jubilant content, of congratulations and felicitations, such as she had sometimes pictured to herself, but such as she had scarcely hoped ever to experience. Alas!

when the sun comes to the meridian, it begins at once to travel westwards; when the summer arrives at its full glory, it soon fades into the sere and yellow leaf; when the moon reaches the full, her wane is not far off. From that resplendent day of days, when Miss Greenway tapped three times that huge, solid block, and pronounced it duly laid, her triumphs gradually decreased, although she was certainly, and without question, still leading lady of St. Mildred's; for Mrs. Pettifer in those days was nowhere and nobody, having fallen into that weak state of health which speedily terminated in her decease, and left the way open for a second Mrs. Pettifer.

Sarah Lane's arrival was a shock; for the dominant spinster knew well enough the power of golden charms, especially in a community like St. Mildred's. And she had enjoyed a monopoly of these metallic attractions for more than seven years, and now stepped in an interloper, a ripe maiden, like herself, with a will of her own, and opinions of her own, and *half a million of money!* When it was noised abroad that the heiress and her half million had found a spiritual home at St. Mildred's, the news—communicated to Miss Greenway in gleesome sort by that beloved man her pastor—fell on her ears as dolefully as if he had announced her excommunication. "Half a million of money!" It sounded like the knell of all her glory, and all her proud pre-eminence. For her own income was only £1,000 a year,—a very handsome income for a single lady, people said. And the single lady thought so too, and comforted herself, as became a woman of wealth, the richest of all the "miserable sinners," who duly made their responses, Sunday by Sunday, at St. Mildred's. Now the very handsome income seemed but a wretched stint; for what was it compared with the vast and ever-accumulating hoards of the lady of St. Oswald's!

Miss Greenway took an early dinner under the disguise of a comfortable, not to say, sumptuous, luncheon. Then she went into her spacious, well-furnished drawing-room—it was a better drawing-room than the one at "The Woodlands"—and she looked around her to see that all was in readiness for the Zion Circle. All was ready. The servants knew their mistress's ways, and had made up a fire that was going to be splendid by-and-by; they had left no

speck of dust on inlaid tables, or old china, or polished walnut-wood; they had duly shaken out the damask curtains, and drawn up the two luxurious couches, and the two delightful lounging chairs, and there was a foot-stool for every lady. Last of all, on the large centre table, which was cleared of all its array of books, book-slides, and card-tray, stood the "Zion-basket," filled with the elegant work upon which the coming ladies were to exercise their ingenuity and their utmost diligence. For the Zion Circle did only what is called "fancy work," though it professed to make articles both useful and ornamental. Whether useful or ornamental, the articles were costly; for no expense was ever spared in the matter of material, and they realised, when sold once a year, in Miss Greenway's drawing-room, a very pretty little sum. And now the annual sale drew on, and it behoved the Zion ladies to use their fingers nimbly; moreover, it was proposed to raise a special fund this year, as the parent Zion Society was in debt, and Miss Greenway felt the responsibility.

She felt it in more ways than many people suspected. It was always a point of honour with her that all the things should be sold; and sold they were. This rather surprised the neighbourhood generally, for the articles were very high priced, and could scarcely be bought by the St. Mildred's folk, who, with few exceptions, were tolerably poverty stricken; while the Zion Society was not at all popular outside its own particular borders, being famous for its extreme views and its rash assertions, which had, indeed, led to its being a society at all, as it had seceded from the parent Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among the Jews simply on the score of that society's lukewarmness, want of faith, worldliness of spirit, &c., &c. The Zion Society, of which the Zion Sewing Circle was the nucleus and pith, was decidedly a company limited, and scarcely known beyond the environs of Bradfield, though it had its representatives in London; yet it would no doubt in process of time outshine the unscriptural, man-fearing "British Society." How, then, so good a sale could be annually secured puzzled even the Zion Circle themselves. Miss Greenway managed it on this wise. As the day wore on she watched how the market went, and such things—

always the most expensive ones—as seemed likely to remain on hand she ticketed "Sold" on behalf of her friends in London who could not come down to the Arleston Zion sale. Not that the London friends ever paid for them, or ever dreamed of paying for them; Miss Greenway herself laid down the full price and something a little over, and soon afterwards her friends in London and elsewhere received sundry handsome presents, for which it is to be hoped they were duly grateful.

All things being in readiness, Miss Greenway went up to dress. She did not indulge in the luxury of a maid, so she had her toilet all to herself. She put on her French grey *moire-antique*—a dress that an elderly duchess might have envied; her second-best set of point-lace, including head-lappets, with which were associated three small white marabout feathers, and some bows of tastefully-arranged ribbon exactly matching the dress. And she took from her jewel-box as many rings as her fingers could be persuaded to accommodate—for she had a fine collection of valuable rings, chiefly diamond, sapphire, and emerald, which she inherited from her great-aunt and godmother, Mrs. Tabitha Gruesome, from whom came the greater portion of Miss Greenway's thousand a year, also the point-lace, sundry velvets, ermines, and sables—to say nothing of old plate, rare china, and table linen of the finest quality. After all she need not have been so envious of Mrs. Pettifer, for Sarah scarcely enjoyed her immense wealth as well as Miss Greenway enjoyed her portion of this world's gifts; Miss Greenway being, on the whole, a woman who liked to feel herself comfortable, and see those about her only a little—just a little less comfortable than herself; while poor Sarah's speciality seemed to consist in an unhappy talent for making everybody more or less uncomfortable, herself included.

There is no rose without a thorn—poets, and moralists, and preachers tell us so, and our own experience confirms it. But some people seem to have the unpleasant knack of so cultivating their roses that the thorns are always in excess of the flowers, and when they get scratched, in handling the spiny stems, they make loud lamentations, and straightway call the world a howling wilderness. Moreover, they like other people to get

scratched, not out of sheer malignancy, but from a sort of theory to which they are wedded, that scratches are the portion of all mankind, and that people who eschew thorns are necessarily to be suspected, as worldly, self-seeking, and irreligious.

Let Sarah live where and how she might, she would always develop more thorns than roses, while Miss Greenway would not touch a thorn if she could possibly help it; though a sad thorn in the flesh, and in the spirit too, was her rival just now. When her toilet was completed, she looked at her watch—a priceless little toy, all blue enamel and brilliants—the gift of that same fairy godmother, Mrs. Tabitha Gruesome, and finding that it wanted a quarter to three, she sat down before her duchess-glass and meditated in this wise: "If she had never come, it would have been I—there was no one else he could have chosen, for a girl would not have suited him. Besides, there is no girl in all the congregation who has a sixpence of her own; and till this woman with her heaps of money came among us, I was counted the rich lady of the place. Why, but for me, St. Mildred's would never have been built—he owes all he has to me. He might have been a poor salaried, put-upon chaplain to this hour, if I had not come to the rescue. Why didn't Ruth Pettifer die twelve months earlier? Well, poor thing! I've nothing to say against her, except that she wasn't strong enough for the place, and was no more fit to be a clergyman's wife than I am to be the matron of a lunatic asylum. She was meek—too meek; and she was a Christian, I've no doubt, though she did not let her light shine. This one does not know what meekness is, and she has married a man who will have his own way if he swing for it. Now, I should have managed him. I know he would have tried me; but I should have got the whip-hand of him somehow, though he never would have known it, for the only way to rule a husband, who is not quite a tame cat in the house, is to humour him in all little things, and above all never to contradict him, always to let him think he is the ruling power, whlle in reality he is only following the leader. I should stoop to conquer, Mrs. Pettifer won't. She'll try hard to conquer, and will go quite the wrong way about it, and it will be as good as seeing a play at

the theatre to watch those two striving for the victory. Charles Pettifer will be too many for her, though she little knows what she has undertaken. That Nora is a fine girl, but too independent, and half a Papist, as I am told. Besides, she is that woman's niece—and how I do abominate that woman, Sarah Pettifer!"

By this time there were some genteel raps at the front door, and Miss Greenway went down to receive her guests, and to open the Zion-basket. They were pretty punctual; only five had been invited, for Miss Greenway had pronounced herself unequal to a larger party; but six arrived. There were Miss Jones, and Miss Smith, and Miss Brown, and Miss Robinson, and the eldest Miss Stampaway, who had lately gone through that process which Nora declined to experience. She was said to have come out from the world, though the world, which in her case meant her sisters and their friends, were insulting enough to say that it had deserted her. For the eldest Miss Stampaway was almost thirty-five, and she had had within the last year a serious illness, which destroyed her good looks, such as they were. I should be sorry to say or to believe that Miss Stampaway was what her sisters and their fast, thoughtless set declared her to be; for I really think she wished—having hitherto found no satisfaction in worldly pursuits—to seek consolation in religion. Only—she didn't know what religion actually was, and there was no one at St. Mildred's to tell her, but plenty of people quite ready and willing to mislead her.

Miss Greenway had petted her as "an interesting case." And she had exhorted her to steadfastness; for the six worldly sisters—and they *were* worldly, in spite of Mr. Pettifer's rousing sermons—and the four dissipated brothers, had ceased their endless frays, and proclaimed an amnesty amongst themselves, that they might more effectually persecute the one who had joined another faction. And in those days Caroline Stampaway, it must be confessed, had a hard time of it at home, and stood sadly in need of some true source of comfort. Miss Greenway was quite willing to act the part of sympathiser and spiritual adviser; but she was not pleased to-day, for her *protégée* had taken an unwarrantable liberty in bringing to the Zion Circle an uninvited guest. "*You* know, Caroline," she whispered

to her, as they stood together over a tangle of white *filoselle* and gold thread, "that I welcome only *believers* to these select meetings! You should not have brought that young lady without consulting me."

"Dear Miss Greenway, I am so sorry," replied Caroline, still whispering; "but Mary Bridgewood is a believer."

"Oh! that alters the case!" replied Miss Greenway, still tartly. "If you had let me know, I would have included her in your note of invitation." And then she thought of Nora and Fanny Bethell, who, to the best of her knowledge, were out-and-out believers; and she hoped Miss Stampaway would never hear that she had gone through the form of asking them to be there that afternoon.

First of all, the work being arranged, Miss Greenway read aloud some account of their special mission, and stated how many Jews had been converted and taken back to Palestine at the society's expense, and how it was intended by the Bradfield Branch to set up certain Jews in business in what was supposed to be the High-street of Jerusalem. Whenever the Zion Society converted a Jew, they at once took measures to restore him to his own country and to set him up in business in Jerusalem or Jericho, or in any other sacred place he chose. Half-a-dozen or more Jews had actually set out, with merchandise and capital, for the Holy Land, but only one was satisfactorily reported as having arrived and opened shop in some queer street with an unpronounceable name in the very heart of Jerusalem. The others had loitered by the way, and there was good reason to believe that one had tarried somewhere in Turkey and become a Mussulman.

The business of the afternoon having been transacted, the ladies began to converse. "Do you know," said Miss Greenway, addressing her audience generally, "that our beloved pastor and his bride are expected home in less than a week?"

Miss Jones gave a loud snort—it was her way of expressing dissatisfaction, and everybody, save the stranger, Mary Bridgewood, understood it. "I'm very glad to have our pastor back again," she said, in a deep, mannish voice, "but I don't care much about his bride; to my thinking he might have done very well without one. What does

St. Paul say? 'Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife!' and a *bishop*, which means simply a pastor, I'm told, is to be the husband of one wife!"

"Of one wife at a time," amended the Misses Smith, Brown, and Robinson in chorus. Miss Stampaway sewed beads on canvas as for her life, and laughed inwardly.

"It says nought about one at a time," replied Miss Jones, glaring over her spectacles—she was always fierce when corrected; "and much as I esteem Mr. Pettifer, I feel that he has gone clean against Scripture in marrying again. And I shan't fail to tell him so the first time he calls upon me. I don't approve of second marriages." Whereof ensued a buzz of small talk, rather incoherent, and difficult of comprehension; but, listening attentively, you might discern that the other ladies were defending second marriages with all the powers of rhetoric, and all the eloquence of which they were severally mistress. Miss Jones had had no hopes, on her own account, it may be presumed; for she was twenty years Charles Pettifer's senior, and she had a very genuine abhorrence of the holy estate of matrimony. She was always angry with people who married, and she had taken a violent dislike to the new Mrs. Pettifer while she was Sarah Lane.

"Any man has a right to marry a second or even a third time," said Miss Brown, sententiously; "but it is a grievous thing when a Christian minister so far forgets himself as to seek a wife for the sake of filthy lucre."

Miss Brown was not more than forty, and a very presentable woman; but no filthy lucre had fallen to her share; it behoved her, therefore, to despise the vanity of worldly riches, and to warn her friends against the temptations and snares which wealth involves. She considered it decidedly pious to be poor.

"Perhaps Mr. Pettifer really liked Miss Lane?" hazarded Miss Stampaway. She was frowned down at once, all except the stranger declaring with more or less vehemence that it was impossible he could have sought her for her own sake, or that he would have encumbered himself with her, had she not been so outrageously rich.

"I dare say she courted him," said Miss Robinson, sourly. "Indeed, I have been as good as told that she did. He would see nobody but her, when his poor wife

died, and then Miss Nora was sent away. A sharp girl like that is in the road when one has one's little game to make."

The ladies agreed that Miss Lane probably *had* made advances; that she had, as Miss Robinson elegantly expressed it, made her little game, and carried away the prize.

"Such an unsuitable person!" said one.

"A temper that is absolutely vicious, I hear!" said another.

"Quite uneducated; knows next to nothing!" cried a third, angrily.

"All sorts of low habits!" assented a fourth. "You should hear what Ann Skerritt, who has just left her service, can tell you. She'll do any dirty housework, just as another lady plays the piano, or does embroidery, for recreation."

"Ah! I know *who* he should have married!" sighed Miss Brown, with a sentimental glance at Miss Greenway.

"He might have married ten people, had he only just common sense," put in Miss Greenway, fearing lest Miss Brown, who was not always judicious, should say something quite too personal. And then they began to enumerate the different ladies whom Mr. Pettifer might, had he not been so sorely led away, have espoused, with advantage to himself and to the satisfaction of his flock.

"He could only have married one of us," said Miss Stampaway, presently. "And Miss Lane's money will be very useful at St. Mildred's, and of course she will subscribe largely to the Zion Circle. And if they quarrel it will not matter to us."

"Yes," conceded Miss Smith; "her money will be very useful, of course; only, if she is so close as they say, perhaps it will not be very freely given. And then, that dashing carriage and pair! There is not its like in Arleston. *I*"—with a tremendous emphasis on the personal pronoun—"think it extremely inconsistent."

"Excessively so," assented Miss Greenway. "I do not like to see a minister of the Gospel rolling about in his own carriage—unless he be a bishop. Are we not expressly told that a soldier of Christ should endure hardness?"

"Most certainly," answered Miss Jones, with another

great snort; "we never hear of St. Paul or St. Peter driving about in a close carriage with a pair of prancing horses. I wonder what would have been said of them if they had gone tearing up the streets of Jerusalem to the very Temple-gates, as Mr. Pettifer and his bride-elect tore up to St. Mildred's the very last week-night service there was before the wedding!"

"It's all pride—the pride of the carnal man," sighed Miss Brown.

"But," said Miss Bridgewood, speaking modestly, and for the first time, "there is no sin in a carriage if its owner can really afford it, especially if he give to the cause of God in proportion to his personal expenditure. Money was intended to circulate, and keeping up an establishment gives a good deal of honest employment to a good many people. And it would scarcely be fair to call upon Mrs. Pettifer to relinquish that to which she is so justly entitled simply because she has married a clergyman. Also, it seems to me that, if one clergyman ought to go on foot on principle, another, whatever be his position, should do the same, be he bishop or archbishop, or simply curate."

The ladies looked astonished and indignant. Miss Stampaway coloured, and wished she had left Mary Bridgewood at home. Miss Greenway, with much dignity, replied for the whole party—"Excuse me, Miss Bridgewood; as you are not one of us, you cannot possibly be qualified to give an opinion. At these little Christian meetings of ours, to which, as a rule, only members of our own church are admitted, the utmost harmony prevails, and nothing approaching to controversy of any sort is ever permitted."

Miss Bridgewood was not aware that she had approached any controversial subject; but she was wise enough to bow and keep silence, at the same time thinking that the little Christian meeting had better indulge in a little friendly controversy, rather than in so much foolish and unkind gossip. It was quite a relief when tea was announced; all rose with alacrity, and went into the dining-room, where "high-tea" of the very highest species was awaiting them. It would take too long to enumerate half the good things that Miss Greenway had provided, for the Zion high-teas were justly celebrated. Think of everything that is deli-

cious in the way of jams and marmalades; think of every sort of delicate fancy bread and a dozen kinds of costliest biscuits; think of choice cold, savoury meats, game, and poultry, all most sweetly garnished; of ripe fruits glowing in silver baskets; of pyramids of hot-house flowers and sparkling bonbons; of light, elegant confections; of seas of rich cream, and apparently endless streams of strong tea and fragrant coffee; think of everything that could possibly adorn so *recherché* a banquet—and then you will have some faint idea of Miss Greenway's elegant, comforting, monthly Zion Circle high-teas!

The repast being at length over—for the heavenliest high-tea must come to an end—Miss Greenway and Miss Brown read by turns "Judah's Lion," by the late Charlotte Elizabeth, who seems to have written many volumes expressly for the religious school to which these ladies belonged. "But," said Mary Bridgewood afterwards, "they had better read the police reports or the trashiest of novels than talk foolish, harmful gossip and venomous scandal." For a great deal more was said at this select sewing-meeting than I have cared to tell you; not one of the Zion ladies, as it is, seems ever having heard of the Christian duty of restraining that unruly member, the tongue, or of the necessity of practising that matchless grace which the apostle declares to be even greater than Faith and Hope. That is to say, they had heard only with the outward ears, with which both men and women may hear a great deal, and yet be not one jot the wiser or one tittle the better for it.

But quite enough has been detailed to show that Mr. Pettifer's circumscribed popularity was likely to be still more circumscribed, on account of his auriferous marriage; and that his wife was likely to reap an abundant harvest of her favourite thorns, and to discover a new grievance at the rate, at least, of one a day and two on Sundays.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

NORA BECOMES A HEROINE.

On the same afternoon on which the Zion Circle held their *séance* of needlework and idle chatter, Nora and Fanny took a walk in the garden. The sun had not yet set, and the air, for late October, was mild and balmy.

"Let us put on our shawls and take a turn for just a quarter of an hour," said Fanny. "We have not been out to-day, and this sort of head cold never gets cured by keeping within doors. Will you come, Nora?"

Nora would. She was just feeling tired of her long stay in the house, and in half an hour it would be getting dark. So the two girls, well muffled up, went pacing up and down the garden-walks, chatting as they went.

"When is your aunt coming home?" asked Fanny.

"Some time next week. She did not fix any day. I shall have everything quite prepared after Sunday, for I shouldn't be surprised if she returned without any further notice."

"I think I had better go home on Monday."

"Oh, please not, Fanny! Do stay till *ma tante* and the Pettifer are really here; *ma tante* invited you, you know! and they do not want you particularly at St. Oswald's."

"I am afraid when they do return it will be miserable for you, Nora."

"I will try for it not to be miserable! I mean to be very good to the Pettifer—if he is not too hateful; I will even try to say *mon oncle*, when I address him. I am afraid, Fan, that long happy time in the spring and summer spoiled me a little. Then, when I did come home, there was all the bustle of the impending wedding, and then the wedding itself, and since that day we have been very comfortable, you and I. It has all been unsettled since last M[illegible] I went away; but now I

suppose we shall have to begin again in the old way, and yet it will not be the old way either—I sometimes wish it were."

"I wish Arleston and St. Oswald's were not so far apart."

"So do I. It was so good when I could see some or all of you every day. But I could not go back to that dreadful Salamanca House—it was insufferable! What that back sitting-room was like on a dull day, I could not tell you. Figure to yourself a kitchen, a *salle de pénitence*, and a dull refectory, all in one! Here we have nice rooms, and now much new furniture, and this so pleasant garden. Also, I have my loved piano, and my kind, clever Monsieur Quaverette, once a week; and my German lessons, and sunshine, that is not so very much smoked! If only I could get more books, and if I had only a girl-companion —not another dear friend, such as you and Gertie are to me; that might not be, I think; one cannot have many true *chéries* in a life-time. But I have a great envy to know Miss Stanley, who is very nearly my own age; and Rhoda says so good and clever, and so nice. I did ask *ma tante* to call and take me with her, but she would not; she will have no dealings with Dissenters, only that they must pay her the rent. There she is—you can see her through the apple-trees—Miss Stanley, I mean, not *ma tante!*"

And where they were just then they could see over a large part of the Wood Cottage garden. The leafy screen of summer foliage was gone, most of the trees were bare, or very nearly so; and the wall which divided the grounds of the two houses was so low that, while it formed a barrier, it did not conceal much of that which lay beyond it. It was the cottage kitchen-garden on which they looked; and there, striving to reach a ripe, rosy apple, the last upon the branch, was a tall, slim girl, very plainly dressed, and yet most unmistakably a veritable young gentlewoman. "There," said Nora, "that is Miss Stanley! I wish it were not bad manners to call out to her, and wish her *bon jour*, or something civil; I do so want to know her. I did bow the last time I met her, but we spoke not."

"Perhaps that will come."

"I wish it may. But it will be not so good as knowing her in the regular way. I cannot ask her in here, you see.

I wish something would happen to bring her in; *ma tante* would soon forget that she is not of your communion; but the Pettifer, he is what you call *rabbit*, about the Dissenters, though he says they are Christian brethren. Truly, I comprehend it not!"

Fanny laughed. "You mean *rabid*, Nora!"

"Ah, yes! rabbit is a little beast, I know."

"Why do you not say '*our* communion'?"

"Because, though I like the teachings of your dear papa, and though I like much a great deal of the service of the English Church, I am not sure that I am in my heart at one with her. But I know so little that I would rather say nothing now."

"Shall we go to Carvary on Sunday evening?"

"I am not sure that we ought, at least as touches myself. I know *ma tante* would not like it, yet I cannot tell whether I mean for the future to do what she likes in these matters; because now, you see, her mind will go with the Pettifer's, and with his mind I can never go. Dr. Bethell would not mind your going to Carvary for once?"

"Nor for twice, if I wished it. When papa calls the Noncons Christian brethren he means it, and he treats them as brethren who are all equal in one father's house. He is very fond of Ernest Stanley, you know; it is odd you never met him when you were with us."

"Was he not ill, and away from home early in the summer, when I was with you?"

"I think he was, and then we went away. I have a happy thought, Nora. Next time Mr. Stanley comes to see us, I will get mamma to ask him to bring his sister, and you shall meet her."

"That will do nicely, just as well as something happening. Fanny, we must go in, the sun has set. Let us enter by the side door, I want to speak to cook. I have given Rhoda leave to go out to tea. *Mais, qui est—cet homme là?*"

The *homme* in question was a very disagreeable-looking individual; the sort of man whom no one, however inexperienced in the world's wicked ways, would wish to see about his house and in parlance with his servant.

"He is a *mauvais sujet*," said Nora. "And, Fanny, I have seen him before this. I cannot remember where."

"He looks as if he were on the prowl; I do not like him," said Fanny. "What can your cook have to say to him?"

"I cannot think; I like not that cook. Let us go boldly, and ask the strange man what he wants." But the man, seeing the young ladies approach, made an abrupt exit, so that when they reached the side-door it was closed, and they had to ring for admittance. "And cook must have seen that we were coming," observed both Nora and Fanny.

Cook certainly looked rather "flustered," as she would have said herself, when she made her appearance. Nora asked at once who the intruder was, and received for reply: "A tiresome fellow, miss, begging! I can't think why the p'lice lets so many vagrants go about."

"He did not look like a beggar, but very much like a ruffian. And it seemed to me that you were talking like friends."

Cook gave Nora a glance, half frightened and half furious, and muttered something which could not be understood. Nora gathered, however, that she was told "not to come the missis over her!"

"I shall be glad when *ma tante* does come back," said Nora, as they were drinking tea an hour afterwards. "That is a horrible woman; I fear greatly she means evil to us."

"I do not see what harm she can do. She will not try to poison us, I suppose."

"I am not afraid of that; but I shall not easily forget her face, when I said, what I am positive was a fact, that she and that *mauvais sujet* talked together, like friends. And *ma tante* permits not that people come to that door."

But when cook came presently to remove the tea-tray, she appeared to be in a most amiable frame of mind. She performed all Rhoda's duties as deftly as if she had been a born and bred parlour-maid, and when nothing more remained to do, she meekly requested orders for supper, and hoped the young ladies would let her toss them up some nice little thing that they could fancy. She was clearly desiring to efface any unpleasant impression

that her previous conduct might have created. The girls agreed that they liked her no better in this mood than in the other. But when the piano was once opened, and their favourite duets commenced, they forgot all about cook and the man at the side-door. When nine o'clock struck, the supper tray, very simply covered, after all, was brought in by Rhoda, who had returned to time. That was one of the best things about Rhoda, Nora said—you always knew that you might depend upon her. After supper, the girls went back to the piano and finished their practice; then they glided into sacred music, then they began to discuss hymn tunes, and then to repeat verses of their favourite hymns. Last of all, they sang together to the well-known chant in "Hymns Ancient and Modern," "Abide with me," Nora playing. When they had sung the last line—

"In life, in death, O, Lord, abide with me,"

it was eleven o'clock. The fire had burned to white ashes, and the gas had sunk dim and low, as it often does in the outskirts of large towns towards midnight. Outside, the wind was howling like a Banshee.

"Oh, dear, how cold it is! How foolish to have let the fire out," said Nora. "Let us go into the kitchen; there will be some fire there, I dare say, and the servants must be gone to bed. We will just get warm, and be off ourselves; we shall have no beauty-sleep to-night."

"No," said Fanny, absently, with a little shiver. "Oh, what a shame of me to forget the fire. What is it, *petite?*"

"I am nervous, queer; don't you know? I have got the creeps, and the crawls, and the shudders; but it is not the cold. I am tolerably warm."

"So you are. It is the wind, then. It makes one think of all sorts of dismal things. And yet I half like it. Hark! what a wild sweep; not unlike the chromatic scale."

"It is so eerie! Dear me, how foolish I am! Singing that sweet hymn ought to have made me feel better." Nora opened the large Bible and read, "'The Lord is my light and my salvation? whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?'

There!" she added, "that ought to comfort us if anything can! I am getting nervous myself, and you know I have to see to the doors and fastenings. I promised *ma tante* never to omit going round the last thing. Rhoda is careful, but she is young; and cook I trust not, though *ma tante* does, because she raves about the lovely sermons of the Pettifer."

In the hall was the usual barricade—tongs, shovels, pokers, and tea-trays in imposing array, and bells upon the doors, all of which had bolts enough for a county jail. Sarah had extracted a solemn promise from Nora that, during her absence, the house should be shut up and defended in the usual way. "Indeed," Nora said, the first night she and Fanny were left in charge; "I was half afraid she was going to make me swear fealty to the shovel and tongs! But it is only Rhoda who can place them properly; they would be sure to clatter down in the middle of the night if they were left to me; it is quite a science to get them at precisely the right angles."

"It would be rather startling if they did come down. Suppose your puss should displace them?"

"She is always shut up in the kitchen the last thing. We shall find her now on her cushion by the fire."

And so they did; but they found cook as well sitting idly before a very good fire. She rose and seemed confused when the girls entered. "Why are you not in bed, cook?" asked Nora, gravely; "you know the rules of the house; your mistress will ask if they have been obeyed." Cook replied civilly, though with a strange, defiant look, that she had the toothache, and did not want to go to bed. But her young mistress insisted. "I will give you some camphor-liniment that will at least ease it, though it will scarcely cure it, and you must go to bed at once. Madame expects that I remain below till all are upstairs, and now it is half-past eleven."

Nora fetched the bottle of liniment from the closet where it was kept, and made cook apply it before the fire. And having no longer any excuse the woman lighted her candle, and, with a sullen countenance, went away without wishing the young ladies good night.

"It is quite a pity to leave this good fire, Nora," said Fanny, when the clock in the hall—the same clock which

had ticked so loudly on the night of the attempted robbery in Poplar-street—struck twelve. "What a comfortable kitchen this is! Let us brush our hair, and get ready for bed down here."

"A very good notion," replied Nora, springing up; "I will fetch the brushes and our dressing-gowns. I really have sat up till I am wider awake than I have been all day. I do not feel in the least like going to sleep."

"Nor I either. I wonder what ails us. Perhaps there is electricity in the air; there often is during these wild autumn gales. But I wish the wind would not shriek so."

When in about five minutes Nora came down, laden with sundry toilet requisites, she found Fanny much agitated; she thought she had heard footsteps in the pump-yard outside: nay, she was quite sure of it. She was too frightened to stir, or she would have run upstairs after Nora.

"Don't be frightened," said Nora, herself a little disturbed. "The wind has shaken something; or it is the cats. I wish we had a dog; even poor old Snap was useful. But he flew at Mr. Pettifer, and *ma tante* had him sent away. Hush, Fanny! I thought I *did* hear something!" and Nora turned down the gas to the least point, leaving just a faint, blue glimmer, and listened intently. Half-an-hour passed, and all was still as death, only broken by the girls' whispers. They agreed to sit up till half-past one, and then, if all was still and tranquil, to go to bed. "But we must have some more coals," said Nora; "we need not be starved, we will keep up the fire. Oh, dear, the scuttle is empty. But there will be some ready for the morning in the back kitchen; I wonder if I can find it in the dark? I do not want to turn up the gas. Oh, I will just light a match. All the windows at the back are shuttered."

Nora went, but returned without the coals. "Fanny!" she said, in a gasping whisper, "there are things which I like not. The old tray that ought to be against the back-door opening into the yard is not there, though I am sure Rhoda would not forget it. It has been taken away, Fanny, and all the bolts are undrawn, only the key is turned, and —and—I am not quite sure about that."

Fanny turned so pale that Nora feared she might faint;

she did not know that her own face was utterly colourless. She trembled in every limb, but her courage did not fail her. Again she crept back to the outer kitchen, which the cook, being a Bradfield woman, called the "brewus," the Midlandshire pronunciation of brewhouse. Very quietly Nora drew the two strong bolts which had been put on the door when Miss Lane took possession of "The Woodlands." At least there was something between themselves and the suspected danger—it would take some time and make some noise to force two heavy bolts a foot-and-a-half in length. She dared not try the key, lest she should betray her presence. But, in rising from slipping the lower bolt, she caught her foot in the mat and stumbled, making a slight, dull sound; then she thought she heard a voice; she listened and was sure. One man was speaking to another; it was no fancy. In another minute there was a very light tap at the door, then another, then another! and a low voice, "All right, Judy?"

A sudden inspiration seized Nora; she said afterwards that her whole course of action was flashed upon her mind in a moment, and the words—"The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?" seemed to be whispered in her ear. As the last tap was given she replied to the signal in a low voice, which she tried to make gruff like the cook's—"Wait a bit." And the answer came through the keyhole—"All right, old gal! 'taint time yet by half an hour; you're a trump! Keep you still till half after one."

Fanny heard this, and with difficulty repressed a scream, but fortunately she controlled herself, and followed Nora into the inner kitchen. There was a door between the two kitchens, which Nora shut and locked and bolted; she had had to unlock it when she went for the coal.

"There is treachery, Fanny," she said, solemnly. "I know what I will do; first, I will wake Rhoda; she sleeps not with that base cook, you know, but in the chamber of *ma tante*, while we are alone. Come with me, Fanny. The other doors are doubly and trebly safe; there is no danger yet inside the house."

They stole upstairs, and they were sure they heard a rustle on the upper flight.

Nora spoke out boldly—"Why are you not in bed,

cook? I demand to know the meaning of your conduct!"

She knew well enough. Mrs. Cook, hearing no sound in the house, had concluded that the young ladies had at last retired, and was coming stealthily down to admit her accomplices.

"My tooth is that bad," said the woman.

"Well, go to bed again; going about in the cold will only make it worse. I will bring you the chloroform solution which Rhoda had for her faceache. Go back, I say!"

The cook dared not disobey; she was a powerful woman, and could have settled Nora and Fanny quite easily. She could only be conquered by stratagem. "Don't betray yourself for the world," whispered Nora, as they stood on the lower landing; "but while I tell her what to do with the chloroform—she does not really want it—you take the key of the spare attic door as quietly as you can, and fit it into the lock of the cook's door outside."

Nora took up the chloroform. "Dear me, cook," she said, "how pale and frightened you look; the pain is not so bad as that?"

"It's bad enough," grumbled the woman; "and you are white as white, Miss Nora," she added suspiciously.

"Do you wonder?" asked Nora, angrily. "Why do you go creeping about the house like a ghost, or like a thief? Miss Bethell has been nearly startled out of her senses."

"You didn't hear any noise downstairs, did you?"

"Yes, I did; I thought it might be cats."

"Them cats is such a plague! they break everything down in that backyard. I found the mop in the gutter, and the pail over-turned, only the other morning. It was cats, you may be sure, Miss Nora."

"Very likely there are cats about; we must have a house-dog to drive them away. Now, cook, take your clothes off, and get into bed; what can you mean by not undressing? It is past one o'clock! I tell you, plainly, I like not your behaviour. Only use what I tell you of the chloroform; if you put on too much it will hurt the skin. See, it is marked '*Poison!*' Good-night; let me hear no

more of you. It is time we were all in bed and asleep. Come, Fanny!"

"Nora shut the door, *and locked it!* Cook was safely disposed of for the present. Whether she knew she was locked in they did not know; for the key went easily, and Nora turned it quietly, under cover of a little stumble from Fanny, who came inadvertently, but most opportunely, full tilt against a small hot-water can left on the landing.

"Now we must wake Rhoda."

There was no time to lose. The moments were speeding with frightful rapidity towards the fatal half-hour, when cook would be due at the back-kitchen door. It was difficult to arouse Rhoda out of her first sleep; but, once wide awake, she comprehended fully the threatened danger, and was out of bed, and dressing with marvellous rapidity, while the girls explained, and told what they had heard and done.

"That's good!" said Rhoda. "Locking cook in was the best thing you can do, ma'am. Where's the plate?"

"In our room. I suppose it is always there at night—that is, the plate in daily use."

"I *took* it there," said Rhoda. "I came upstairs just after the clock struck ten. Cook was bearish, and I went off to bed directly after supper. But then, I will take my oath, I slipped both the bolts on the back-kitchen door, and fixed the tray as usual. Some one must have taken that away. Let us see after the plate, Miss Nora."

They went to Nora's room, where the plate was *not*. It had been removed, though the basket, with some knives in it, and a newspaper laid over the top, was left in its usual place. Where the spoons and forks were they could guess; doubtless the cook had them in her possession.

"Now, what are we to do next?"

It was nearly the half-hour, and the robbers would be on the alert. If they strove to enter by force, what could three girls do against several strong men! However, the traitor in the camp was safe for the present; the foe within could not help the foes without, and the defences were tolerably strong. In the stillness of the night they heard the timepiece in Mr. Pettifer's study strike the half-hour, and they listened for the signal from without.

"I tell you what," cried Rhoda; "let's turn on the gas everywhere; let's ring all the bells like mad; and do you, Miss Nora and Miss Fanny, go and play a loud, thundering tune upon the piano,—that 'Marseillaise' will just do! They'll never try to come in with such a racket going on; they won't know what to make of it; and cook will be scared out of her senses."

"Shall we do it?" said Nora, turning to Fanny. "It is no bad plan, and it seems the only one; for we are helpless and alone. Only we should have to keep it up till morning."

Fanny agreed to try it; she was recovering her spirits. But just as Rhoda turned on the landing gas, which was never quite extinguished at night, there came a long, loud clanging at the front door bell, also a thumping at the door itself, which displaced the breakfast-room shovel, and sent it clattering to the ground. At the same moment they heard cook's voice overhead; she seemed to be alternately swearing and shaking the locked door, as if she would break it down. The gang then were determined to force an entrance; perhaps the cook had given them some signal from her window.

The three girls looked at each other in speechless terror. "The good Lord help us!" cried Rhoda. Fanny sat down on the stairs because she could not stand; Nora prayed silently. Another peal, and another rapping on the door-panels—there was no knocker. "Let us go and ask who is there," said Nora; "we can but parley as long as we may. I feel sure our good God will send us deliverance."

They went down into the hall, and boldly required to know who rang and knocked so late. A voice familiar to both Rhoda and Fanny answered: "It is your neighbour—I, Ernest Stanley—with a policeman! There are bad characters about your house."

"Thank God!" burst from all those pale, trembling lips. "You are *sure* it is Mr. Stanley?" asked Nora, as Rhoda began to undo the fastenings.

"I know my own pastor's voice," said Rhoda, confidently. "What on earth brought him here, just in the nick of time?"

"Heaven brought him," replied Fanny.

"Yes, Nora; it is Mr. Stanley. I, too, am sure it is his voice."

In another minute Mr. Stanley and the policeman were in the house, listening to the tale the ladies had to tell. The policeman stood on the door-step, and gave the shrill signal which summoned his brethren to his aid, and in a few minutes two more blue-coats made their appearance. They searched the garden and the out-houses, but of course the robbers had made good their retreat at the first alarm, and no one could be found. There was the cook, however, safe enough, caught in her own trap; and two of the policemen went up, and most unceremoniously invaded her retirement, and, still further, insisted on bearing her company.

"But, oh! Mr. Stanley, how did you know?" asked Rhoda, as she was making up a good fire in the kitchen, whither Nora had brought wine and biscuits and bread and cheese.

Mr. Stanley explained. He had been to Wolverham, and had lost the 9.30 train, and so was obliged to wait for the last train, which did not start till midnight. At the Old Street station, to his great annoyance, he found no cab; but, as it was a fine night, walking was not unpleasant. He had almost reached his own gate, when, in the bright starlight, he caught sight of a crouching figure stealing along in the shadow of the evergreens on Mrs. Pettifer's ground. Feeling sure that something was amiss, he went quietly on to his own house, let himself in with the latch-key, and telling his sister, who was up and waiting for him, what he suspected, walked cautiously into his own garden to that part of it which commanded "The Woodlands" garden. That the back of the house was watched he felt convinced; and he had just leaped the low wall, alighting noiselessly on the soft earth, when cook raised her window and telegraphed to some one close under the shadow of the house. That the gang was composed of at least three men he could discern; therefore it was foolish to attack them single-handed. He made his way back to the road, when, to his infinite relief, he soon heard the measured tramp of the policeman, whom he summoned at once to his assistance. And the policeman it was who rang the bell; not very wisely, if he wished to secure his prey.

That first loud peal must have scattered the marauders, for as a rule, robbers have all their wits about them. At any rate, cook was the only prisoner secured.

The grey dawn was breaking when she, arm-in-arm with one policeman, and courteously attended by another, set off for the Arleston police-station. Mr. Stanley followed; and then once more shutting up the house, but leaving the gas well alight, Rhoda and her mistresses went to bed. But, before she retired, Rhoda made up the kitchen fire again, and filled the kettle, and dressed herself in her morning clothes; for, she said, "I'll just lie down, Miss Nora, ready to jump up the moment I am wanted. We are pretty safe to have early visitors, and it's almost five o'clock."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

JUGGED HARE.

RHODA was right; people came to "The Woodlands" betimes that morning, and by nine o'clock they felt as if it were already the middle of the day. Samuel, the coachman, when he came in as usual after attending to his horses, found the household in confusion; and Rhoda, single-handed in the kitchen, at once pressed him into the general service, by putting a round of bread and a toasting-fork into his hand, and bidding him mind what he was about, and not burn or blacken the toast, which was for the parlour breakfast.

"What's the row?" inquired Jehu. "Is cook that bad she can't get the breakfast?"

"Cook's dreadful bad, as bad as can be!" returned Rhoda, with emphasis.

"You'll have to send her to the horsepittle, I guess," was the reply.

"We've sent her to the police-station instead; they'll

understand her complaint there better than at the hospital, I fancy."

"Sent her to the police-station!" And Samuel, who never received an idea that was not equine but by the slowest process, opened his mouth and his eyes, and stared with all his might at Rhoda, greatly to the detriment of the toast, which was literally pushed between the bars.

"Yes!" said Rhoda, snatching the toasting-fork out of his hand. "There! that's only fit for the pigs, and missis can't abide waste, as you know. What stupid things men are! they never know how to do more than one thing, while women learn of themselves to put their hands to anything. Grind that coffee, will you! I suppose you can manage *that*, if you try! And don't upset the milk before it's skimmed; and don't tread on the cat, for she's as flustered as the rest of us."

"I'll tread on her this minute if you don't tell me why her's flustered. Have cook been committing arson or burglary?"

"I don't know what arson is, but as to burglary, that's just it. She's one of a gang!"

Samuel slapped his knee with an air of satisfaction.

"Didn't I say her was a bad 'un? Didn't I, now? Ah! I knows what a female is, and no mistake, Rhoda. I know you for a pretty, sharp, quick-witted, downright respectable young woman, as any man might be glad to get for his wife; and I knew that there cook for an impident, bold-as-brass, lying, prigging hussey! Now, what has her been and done? Tell us all about it, Rhoda, my lass, and I'll —I'll clean all your tins for you for a week to come."

"Well!" said Rhoda, tossing her shapely head, that was always smooth and neat, even before breakfast, "the men beats all for curiosity! Talk of women!—why, the women would never be curious at all if it was not for the men! And oh, Samuel, you're the very curiousest of men!"

"Be I? Well, never mind! How about that there cook, as I allus knew warn't no good?"

"That cook was in league with a gang, and she arranged to open the doors when we were all a-bed and fast asleep, and let in her 'complices. Only, Miss Nora was one too many for her, and the good God made our Mr. Stanley miss the train at Wolverham." And Rhoda, while she

sliced the bacon into the pan, gave a brief and graphic account of the night's experiences. Rhoda was clever at condensation; there were three things she could not bear to waste, she said—money, time, and words. And when she had concluded Samuel knew almost as much about the affair as if he had been present. He ground the coffee in silence, then he shook his head gravely, and observed that he never had no opinion of women, let alone cooks, as wouldn't or couldn't look you straight in the face when they was spoken to! And he regretted that he was not in a position to give evidence at the forthcoming trial.

As the magistrates sat that day, Nora and Fanny and Rhoda had all to attend at the police-court, as well as Mr. Stanley, who, on the part of Nora, had given the woman in charge. The result was, of course, that Mrs. Cook was duly committed to take her trial at next assizes. It was arranged that Samuel should sleep in the house till the return of his master and mistress, and accordingly that functionary proposed to amuse himself by going out at the back door every night, between ten and eleven o'clock, and firing off an old gun, which would make a great noise, if it did nothing else.

The cook sullenly refused to disclose the names of her accomplices, and indeed persisted in denying her own complicity. The young ladies were mistaken, she averred. She had nothing to do with the burglars, as was proved by their addressing her as "Judy," whereas her real proper name was Mary Anne; and it was hard indeed upon a poor honest woman, if she was to be sent to prison just because bad men attempted a house that had a bad name, on account of the trays and fire-irons reared against the doors, as was as good as an invitation to thieves to come and try what they could do; for it stood to sense, that when a house was double-extra barricaded, there was always something in it worth coming for! And cook—who was clearly a woman of parts—might have got off, if the forks and spoons, the toast-rack and the egg-stand, had not been found in her room, tied up in an old shawl, instead of being in Nora's rooms, where Rhoda declared on oath she had duly conveyed them before going to bed herself, as had been her custom ever since the departure of Mrs. Pettifer.

The next morning came a letter bearing the Calais postmark. The newly-wedded pair were so tired of French frivolity, and so disgusted with French irreligion, and so full of longings for the peaceful rest which "The Woodlands" afforded, that they had resolved not to wait for any prescribed period, but to return home immediately without further delay.

"And so, my dear Nora," wrote Mrs. Pettifer, in conclusion, "you may expect us home to-morrow evening. We shall cross early in the morning, and the tidal-train will take us on to London with all speed. We shall get something to eat at Charing Cross, and go straight on to Euston Square; but, as we are not quite certain about the North-Western trains, we cannot be sure as to the time of our arrival at Bradfield, and therefore you had better not send Samuel to meet us, or the horses may get cold, and I am particularly warned against veterinary surgeons' bills. A car will answer our purpose very well, the Bradfield cars being larger than any sort of cab, or fly, anywhere else. We hope to find all well at home. Believe me, my dear Nora, your affectionate aunt, SARAH PETTIFER.

"P.S.—We think France a very wicked place, and the churches, with very few exceptions, are Roman Catholic. You can understand that we are most anxious to leave this unhappy land of Sabbath-breakers and Papists. Your uncle desires his love; the French air does not appear to suit him. Have a fire in his study all day, and order cook to get us a nice little supper; your dear uncle fancies jugged hare; there will be plenty of time for it if you speak to cook as soon as you have read this. Should there be any insuperable difficulty about the hare, which is not at all likely, your uncle would prefer stewed steak, with onions and mushrooms; but the steak must be tender, and the onions mild. I hope our room is well-aired."

"Whatever shall we do?" said Nora, when she and Fanny had read the letter. "I am afraid Rhoda knows nothing about hares, and I am sure I do not. And *jugged* hare, too! It is cooked in a jug somehow, I suppose."

"Yes," returned Fanny, "it must be; else why

'jugged'? For it is not served in a jug, that is certain, because we have it sometimes at home, and very nice it is. You see, your aunt knows nothing of what has happened. Could Rhoda stew a steak?"

"Not as Mr. Pettifer and *ma tante* would like it, I am afraid. Rhoda can do plain things very well, but they want something special to-night, I am sure; and perhaps Mr. Pettifer will be put out if he has not the supper he desires. I would cook that hare myself if I knew how. Let us go and speak to Rhoda."

Rhoda, being put in possession of the facts, sorrowfully confessed that she could not jug a hare, though she was pretty certain that it was done *somehow*, in an earthen jar in the oven.

"But I dare say I could do it if I had a proper book, Miss Nora," she said at length. "That wicked woman had a fine cookery book, but it is locked up in her box, and the police have the keys."

"If we had a book we might all try our hands," replied Nora, brightly; "it would be great fun to cook the coming-home supper ourselves. I dare say we could borrow a cookery-book from Miss Grice's."

"I'll lay any money Miss Stanley has got what you want, and will lend it with pleasure," interposed Rhoda.

"The very thing!" cried Nora. "Why, she told us yesterday that we might count upon her in any emergency; and it is certainly an emergency when one is required to cook a hare, and one don't know how. Let us go in to Miss Stanley, Fanny. After yesterday I feel as if I had known her all my life; and, Rhoda, you had better clear up your kitchen quickly, and get the fire in order; whatever else the hare may want, it's sure to want fire."

"Miss Nora," said Rhoda, her eyes sparkling with fun, "I've heard tell of a receipt for doing hares; but I can only remember the first words of it: they were,—'First catch your hare.' And, though one could never catch a live hare anywhere about Arleston, I suppose a dead one might be ordered at Jupp's, where we get our poultry and game. Anyway, we must have the hare before we cook it."

"I never thought of that," laughed Nora. "And how

to buy a hare I don't know one bit. Jupp is used to selling hares, that's one comfort; and I shall say I want the best hare in his shop, and look as wise as I can. But first we must find out whether it is possible to do this 'jugging,' whatever it may be: let us go at once to Wood Cottage."

Annie Stanley was the best person whom the young mistress of "The Woodlands" could have consulted.

"A cookery-book, Miss Lane? Oh, yes, I have several. You can have which you like, or all of them, if they will help you; but I advise Mrs. Beeton's. It is simpler than the others, and then it is more economical. What is it you are wanting?"

The girls explained, and Annie Stanley discovered the nature of their dilemma; they had not the remotest notion how to proceed with poor puss, in order to make her into presentable jugged hare.

"Has Rhoda ever done anything of the kind before?" she asked.

"No, never," was the reply. "Only she says that in spite of the name no jugs are wanted."

"Then I am afraid the cookery-book will only be a stumbling-block. Jugged hare is not exactly what a beginner should try her skill on. I am afraid Mr. and Mrs. Pettifer may be disappointed in their supper after all, if it is to be prepared by three amateur cooks who have not attempted anything of the kind before. But I will fetch the book."

Nora and Fanny began to read:—"'Skin, paunch, and wash the hare, cut it into pieces, dredge them with flour, and fry in boiling butter. Have ready a pint and a half of gravy. Oh! we can never manage that, can we, Fanny? 'Add a few forcemeat balls!' I wonder what they are?"

"They are little round lumps of stuffing," said Fanny, "and I believe they are made of chopped parsley and suet. Oh, dear, Nora! what a heap of things are wanted besides the forcemeat and the gravy—sweet herbs, and onion, and peeled lemon, and cloves, and port-wine, and currant jelly."

"Miss Stanley is right," said Nora, when for the second time she had carefully perused the recipe. "We never

could do it; it is too difficult a thing to begin with; we should only spoil the hare, and waste all these things we should have to get, and then *ma tante* would be displeased. Could we manage to stew a steak, Miss Stanley?—that must be pretty easy."

"Not very easy, unless you know something about it."

"Then, I am afraid, there is nothing to be done," said Nora, disconsolately. "I will take some lessons in cooking, I am resolved; it is quite humiliating to find one's self so helpless and ignorant. Rhoda can broil rump-steak very nicely; we must be content with that."

"If you will allow me, I will help you. I have jugged a hare most successfully before now. My brother will be out nearly all day; so, if you will engage me as head cook, I think I can promise you that Mr. Pettifer shall not be disappointed of his supper. Is it a bargain?"

"It is only too good of you! Are you quite sure you do not mind the trouble?"

"Quite. I am so vulgar that I really like cooking. It will be just a day's amusement. Come; there is no time to lose—the morning is getting on. Have you the hare ready?"

"No! It is at present in Jupp's shop. I wish you would go with us and choose it."

Annie Stanley was as good as her word. She spent the rest of the day in "The Woodlands" kitchen, explaining and demonstrating the mysterious process of jugging a hare, to the intense admiration of Rhoda, who enticed Nora into the larder for no other purpose than that she might whisper, "Didn't I tell you, now, ma'am, that she was a young lady in a thousand? And every bit the lady too, though she doesn't mind putting her hand to anything that's useful. But I wonder what Mr. Pettifer will say when he knows his supper has been cooked by a Dissenter, the minister of Carvary's own sister!"

The old adage, that "too many cooks spoil the broth," was not verified in this instance, for though all the girls assisted, the result was a very decided success. And soon after tea, having left ample directions, Miss Stanley returned to the Cottage, and Rhoda put on her best cap and her finest apron, and Nora and Fanny made an elegant toilet, in anticipation of the speedy arrival of the

bride and bridegroom, who might now be expected any minute. And even as Nora was putting the finishing touches to the flowers which were to adorn the supper-table, they heard a vehicle of some kind come grinding over the gravel, and they knew that the travellers had reached their home. It had been resolved that, if possible, nothing should be said about recent events till supper was fairly over.

Mrs. Pettifer came in, looking very much like Sarah Lane. Mr. Pettifer looked more vapid and self-complacent than ever. At present he was enacting the *rôle* of the devoted husband; it did not make him one whit the more charming, Nora thought; but when she spoke to him, she swallowed down a whole legion of unpleasant emotions, and addressed him as "*mon oncle*." And her aunt smiled approvingly, and looked really pleased. As for *mon oncle*, he smirked, and nodded approvingly, and patted Nora on the shoulder, and called her "a dear little girl." And then, being affectionately disposed, he kissed his wife, and remarked that he could smell the supper, and he did not care how soon it was on the table.

"I will hasten Rhoda," said Nora, anxious to run away into the kitchen, and see that Miss Stanley's last injunctions were duly observed. Mrs. Pettifer was rather surprised; for, as a rule, Nora never went into the kitchen unless she were sent there; perhaps she was going to turn over a new leaf and become "domesticated." And full of pleasant auguries, and most amiably disposed towards her niece, Mrs. Pettifer went up to her own room. When there was a call for hot water, Nora brought it up herself, like any chambermaid, to her aunt's further astonishment and satisfaction. "Really, Charles," said the bride, as she carried the can into her husband's dressing-room, "Nora is wonderfully improved. She seems bent on making herself useful, and she looks as gay as a lark. I am sure she is glad to see us back again. I wonder if it is Fanny Bethell's influence; I always liked Fanny better than Gertrude, myself. Why, even a month ago, Nora would not have thought of running up with our hot water so amiably. I suppose Rhoda was busy with something; she is dressed, for I noticed the white ribbon in her cap when she opened the door."

The Rev. Charles acquiesced in all that Sarah said. He hoped Nora was going to be amiable, and he said so; and he further thought, but did not say, that it would be very pleasant to be waited upon by a girl so pretty and so piquante as his lovely niece-in-law. And all the while, Rhoda was dishing up the wonderful hare, assisted by Fanny Bethell, who made herself responsible for the red-currant jelly, and Nora kindly undertook her duties, lest the supper should be delayed.

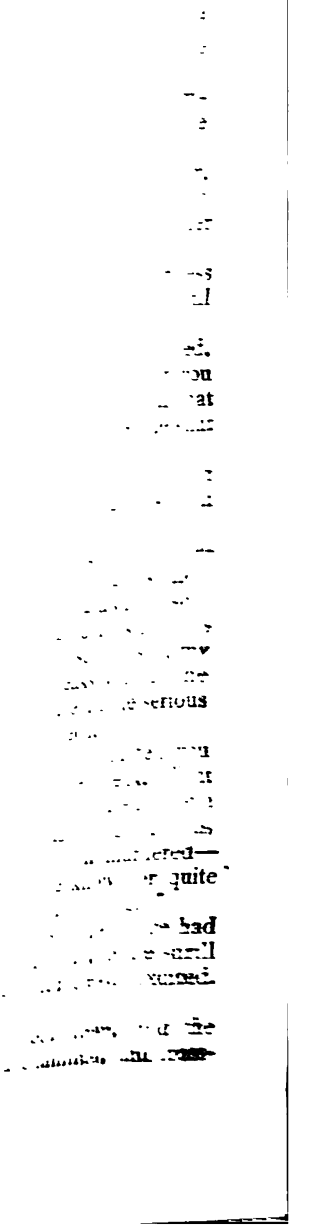
Mr. Pettifer said grace with all the dignity of a clergyman of the Church of England, and then he addressed himself to the hare, which smoked odoriferously before him, Rhoda having removed the cover with a flourish. That Annie Stanley's cookery was appreciated was most apparent; Mr. Pettifer ate, and was satisfied. "Not a little bit more, my dear love?" he said, addressing his wife. "I must say your cook understands her business. I must confess to a leetle weakness for jugged hare; but I am not sure that I ever enjoyed it so thoroughly before. It is delicious! perfectly delicious! is it not, dearest? The gravy is just the thing, so exactly seasoned. As for the hare itself, it melts in your mouth, and the forcemeat is beyond all praise. What do you say, young ladies?"

Fanny was silent; she dared not speak lest she should say something most untoward. Nora replied, with great gravity, "*Mais oui*, I like it. It seems to me that it is properly cooked, this hare-jugged."

"Ah! my dear, far more than 'properly.' It is *exquisite!*" And the reverend gentleman laid down his knife and fork, and tenderly regarded the unconsumed fragments of the defunct hare, and sighed a sigh of ineffable content, like an Epicurean as he was; for good eating, sound sherry and port, and pretty girls were altogether to his taste. And to have all these, by right, at his own table! It was what he had never hoped for; truly the lines had fallen to him in pleasant places. The brother of Betsy Bratt at that moment felt supremely happy.

Then Mrs. Pettifer took up her parable: "I have not a fault to find with the supper, my dear Charles. Our good and faithful cook has done her best, as I knew she would, in honour of our return, and out of honest love and duty to you, her well-esteemed pastor. That is an excel-

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r was one of those men who delight in long

words, and periphrastic expressions. He never spoke of "family prayers," it was always the family altar that was surrounded. Praying was "approaching the throne;" going to church was "ascending to the sanctuary;" singing hymns was "uplifting notes of praise." He generally prefaced his grace before meat with "Let us implore a benediction!" Of course he never lived anywhere, he "resided;" he could not even wash his face like any ordinary mortal, he "performed his ablutions," matutinal or otherwise; when he ate and drank "he took refreshment," or "restored nature;" when he went to bed at night, of course he retired to rest, and sought repose; people who died, deceased, or expired, or departed this transitory life; when they were buried they were entombed, or interred, or committed to the dust; and those who were left behind "attired themselves in the sombre garb of woe." Perhaps this peculiarity was one reason why Mr. Pettifer did not draw larger congregations; and Mr. Pettifer, like the famous Mrs. Malaprop, prided himself greatly on "his parts of speech!"

The family altar having been surrounded for what Rhoda and the young ladies felt to be a most unreasonable period, the master of the house said,—"And now, my dear partner in life, shall we not seek that retirement which the weariness of our poor human frames necessitates? Ah! the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak!" Sarah's flesh just then was so weak that her only reply was an unsuppressed yawn. Nora answered for her. "Yes, we are all horribly tired; let us go to bed!"

And to bed she and Fanny went, for cooking had proved to both a rather fatiguing exercise. But Mr. and Mrs. Pettifer did not enter the conjugal chamber for more than half an hour. They had a good stiff argument, a downright wrangle in fact, on the vexed subject of the defences. Mr. Pettifer insisted on the withdrawal of the fire-irons; Mrs. Pettifer pleaded, remonstrated, urged, warned, and finally grew displeased, and spoke of the house as "*hers*." To which her reverend spouse replied—"Now, my beloved Sarah, when you blessed me with that dear hand"—here he kissed two dumpy fingers—"you gave me with it all your possessions; for husband and wife are but one, and have all things in common: only the husband is the head

of the wife, who, if she be a Christian woman, must be in due subjection to her lord. Therefore, my love, my own Sarah, let me say '*ours*,' in speaking of such things as God has given to us; and let me remind you that the Scripture says, 'Let the wife see that she reverence her husband.'"

Sarah did not like the mention of subjection, and she kept sullen silence, and looked offended. Her lover was turning into her husband, and she did not approve of the transformation; it had never occurred to her that in promising to "obey" she had lost the government of her own house. She made one more effort; but dear Charles was accustomed to hold his own, and, though he had not, according to the Persian maxim, "killed the cat on his wedding-day," he determined that the stroke of fate should no longer be delayed. The warfare ended in marital victory; the tongs, the pokers, and the shovels, and the ancient japanned tea-trays, were all taken down and borne away, and Charles Pettifer triumphed. But his bride laid her head upon her pillow in anything but a gratified state of mind.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THEOLOGY IN THE KITCHEN.

It was spring again, and the Arleston gardens were full of crocuses, and polyanthuses, and budding hyacinths, and Mr. and Mrs. Pettifer were regarded as quite old married people. Sarah dressed handsomely now, and took pains with her personal appearance. She was losing the prim, old-maidish air which had so long distinguished her, and people generally thought her improved. There were changes, too, in the household at "The Woodlands," for it turned out that Mr. Pettifer was extremely fond of spending money, and there was always something to be added, or

some alteration to be effected, and he kept a good table, and talked largely of "laying down" a few pipes of wine. The man-servant—a grave, discreet personage—was duly engaged, and a small room on the ground floor, where Sarah kept her preserves, was metamorphosed into the "butler's pantry." The Pettifers had advertised in the *Record* for an Evangelical footman of sound Church of England principles, and Eastlake had appeared to be exactly the person they required. An Evangelical cook was secured at the same time, and shortly afterwards an Evangelical maid, who was to assist Rhoda in her lighter duties, sew, and attend upon Mrs. Pettifer. Rhoda and Nora were the only non-Evangelicals in the establishment, though Samuel, who was growing as fat and sleek as his horses, did confide to her that he attended St. Mildred's solely as an act of expediency; "for," said he, "the master do preach such bosh, and makes such a muddle of his preachment, that I often go to sleep, and dream about the horses. I am terrible afraid I may wake up some day, all of a sudden-like, and cry out, 'Woo-ah there,' before I remember where I am. I'd go to Carvary with you, Rhoda, only it would be as much as my place was worth, and I don't like changing. I do wonder they let you go to chapel."

"And so do I. I quite looked to have a month's notice when they came back after the wedding, and the master did call me into his study one day, and says he, 'Rhoda, my good girl, I want a little talk with you. You are a very good girl, but I am troubled about your soul.' So I told him I was much obliged to him; but I should like to know why he concerned himself about my soul just then. And he told me a lot about being out of the true Church, and said that he feared I had committed the sin of schism in turning Dissenter; for, you see, I was brought up to Church, and christened at St. Oswald's by Mr. Grover; and the time was when I had the Church Catechism at the end of my fingers, and for the matter of that I could go through it now without a many stumbles. But as I grew up I thought I had a right to choose for myself, and somehow I took to Carvary, and to Mr. Stanley. Mind you, Samuel, I don't mean to say but what there is as good gospel in what you call the Church of England as there is out of it,

only there is not so much in the Church, for one part of it teaches that the bread and wine in the Sacrament is our dear Lord's very flesh and blood; and another part—you know which part well enough—goes on about eternal damnation till one's inclined to say that they believe in the devil far more than they believe in God. And then Mr. Stanley and the service at Carvary suit me, and I am happy there, and enjoy my Sundays; and the long and the short of it is, I've a right to be a Dissenter if I think fit, and I do think fit, and I mean to stop a Dissenter, and I told the master so."

"What did he say? He ain't the meekest man in Bradfield."

"Well, he was wonderful mild and patient for him, and he implored me to come back to my 'mother, the Church.' So I asked him what piece of the Church I must come back to, for I couldn't abide what they call Low Church—very low indeed it is! I am not proud, I hope, but it's too low for me. And as for the High Church, I'd rather turn Papist out and out; and the Broad Church I didn't know much about; it might be good and it might be bad, I couldn't tell. So I thought I would rather stay quietly where I was. Then he urged me again not to despise my privileges, as a baptized child of the Church of England; it's very queer, now, how those Evangelicals, as they call themselves, do go on with baptism, in spite of their fighting the other party about it. And says I, 'Sir, I don't wish to say anything disrespectful about the Church that baptized me, and would have confirmed me, and all the rest, if I had let it; but having come out of a house that's all tumbling down about my ears, I think I should be just a fool if I went back again to live in it, knowing all the while that the mortar was crumbling, and the bricks perishing, and the roof giving way!' 'Whatever do you mean?' says he, seriously. 'Explain yourself, Rhoda.' So I did explain myself. 'I mean, sir,' I said, 'that the Church of England is just like an old, ruinous house that's tumbling to pieces, and it's of no mortal use to go a-patching of it up—down it must come! The best way would be to pull it right down, and build it up more convenient, and make it safe; but that can't be done, I am told by them that know, because this ruinous old house, the Established

Church, is in possession of so many different parties—all of them claiming it as their very own—that they would quarrel to the death about the way it should be built up again. It's quite true what the Bible says, "A house divided against itself cannot stand," and if ever a house was divided against itself it's this unhappy Church of England, that you want me—out of kindness, I know—to come back to. But I can't come.'

"Says he, quite in a fury, 'You *won't*, you mean; you've been led away. You are an ignorant girl, and those Dissenters are shrewd, and like to make converts, and such as you are easy to make. God will protect His Church; it will never come to confusion.' Thinks I, Mr. Pettifer's Church has come to confusion, so it cannot be God's Church, on his own showing; but I did not say so, for I thought it did not become me to argue with my master, and he a clergyman, any more than I could help. Of course it was my duty to give him plain answers to plain questions; but I could not see that I ought to do more, especially as I've got a sharp tongue, and I might say something that I should be sorry for afterwards, so I only replied, 'Well, sir, perhaps it is "*won't;*" I think it is both can't and won't; I can't make one in a Church that does nothing but curse itself, backwards and forwards.'

"'Rhoda!' says he, quite solemn-like, 'I am sorry for you! Who told you such nonsense? Brought up to the Church, as you have been, you ought to have known that cursing is no part of our ritual—except, indeed, on Ash-Wednesday.' So I made answer, 'I don't mean cursing with bell, book, and candle—though I don't see why the very High Church shouldn't do that;—perhaps they do do it!—but I read the papers, the religious papers chiefly. You and mistress said we might have the *Record* in the kitchen when it's done with in the parlour, and I read *that*, sir! and if it doesn't use bad language to those it disagrees with, it says things that Christian folk shouldn't say of each other. Thinks I, I'll see if the other side is any better, and so I got a friend to get me the *Guardian*, and that was every bit as bad, only a little politer.' Says he, 'Dissenters can use pretty hard words, too; do you never read your own papers?' So I said I did, when I got the chance; but, said I, 'they don't go

hitting each other; if they fight, they fight their enemies. They are not pulling down their own house over their heads, like the Church-folk are doing; so, if you please, I'd much rather stay where I am.'"

"You are a plucky girl, Rhoda," said Samuel, admiringly. "You understand religion as well as I understand horses."

"That's not religion, Samuel; though I suppose it has to do with it: religion is something very different from what the master and I talked about."

"Is the master truly religious, do you think, Rhoda?"

"That's not for you nor for me to say. We are not to sit in judgment on our betters. We shall have to answer for ourselves, and the master will have to answer for himself. That's all about it."

"But tell me, *you don't* think as there's no downright out-and-out religious people in the Church of England?"

"Of course, I don't!" and Rhoda looked indignantly at the stolid coachman, as he stirred his tea. "There are good people everywhere—people that love and serve God in all communions. I should be very sorry to think there was not. It is a pity we can't all agree to differ, and be friends; but that's got to come, perhaps. And now I am not going to talk any longer, for the beds have to be turned down, and the fire lighted in missis's bedroom, for there's a frost to-night, the gardener says; and you've got to give your horses their suppers, I guess. When we have our work to do it is wrong to stand chattering about even the best of things. Dr. Bethell taught me first, and Mr. Stanley has taught me since, that work is duty; and duty, done as duty, is religion, far more than talking about churches and their differences."

CHAPTER XL.

WHY NORA WAS NOT CONFIRMED.

THIS conversation in the kitchen, which may be regarded as parenthetical, took place quite in the early spring. It was later in the season—the middle of April, in fact—when there arrived at length the crisis which all through the winter Nora had felt to be impending. Her acquaintance with Annie Stanley had ripened into friendship, although the intimacy was not encouraged by Mr. and Mrs. Pettifer. Still, they could not entirely keep aloof from their next-door neighbours. In the first place, they were tenants, and very good tenants to boot; in the next place, Mr. Stanley, though by no means inclined to push an acquaintance, was talented, well-read, and, even to prejudiced appreciations—a gentleman! And when he and Mr. Pettifer met, in spite of a certain State-Church stiffness and shyness, belonging naturally to one who derived his position from his office, they always—keeping wide of controversy—had a pleasant chat and parted amicably. Also, Nora and Annie held constant palaver over the garden wall, and when Nora went to St. Oswald's Rectory Annie generally accompanied her.

Mr. Pettifer, in his heart, wished to keep the peace with his wife's fair niece; not to be on terms with her would have been as gall and wormwood unto his spirit; and as for Sarah herself, she did not greatly care to push things to extremities. Nora was no bread-and-butter girl, to do because she was bidden, and go where she was told, and she was quite capable of going out into the world to get her own living, rather than bow to a yoke which she felt to be unjustly imposed upon her. Indeed, she had once said—when her aunt and herself had had what Rhoda called "a regular scrimmage"—Sarah could no more live without "scrimmages" than without meat and drink—that while under her aunt's roof she would

not, except for the very sternest and most unmistakable case of conscience, disobey her; but that, if forced beyond a certain point, she would certainly leave "The Woodlands," and go out and get a situation of some kind, where she might exercise her own free will on certain subjects then under discussion. And Sarah knew that Nora's talk was never idle talk; and unless,—and *unless*,—she did not even admit to herself the conditions of that unspoken "unless,"—she did not wish it to be bruited about that she and her niece had parted company on account of incompatibility of sentiments and disposition.

And so the winter passed away. Nora worked hard at her music and her German, and always kept some good, sound, thoughtful reading on hand. Mr. and Mrs. Pettifer alternated between the sharpest quarrels and the most absurd and unnecessary demonstrations of conjugal devotion. But in every fight Mr. Pettifer won the day, and in every love-passage that ensued Sarah grew colder and less effusive. Rhoda was so excellent and trustworthy a servant, that, in spite of her contumacious schism, no one entertained the idea of sending her away, though Mr. Pettifer contrived to make her somewhat of a Pariah in the kitchen, on account of what he termed her "sectarian prejudices." But Rhoda loved Nora too well to be ousted by any small persecutions from her equals; and being among her equals, she did not hesitate to speak her mind pretty plainly, and her shallow antagonists usually had the worst of it. As for vituperation and invective, she only laughed at them; "for," as she exasperatingly remarked to the Evangelical cook, "it amuses you, and it does not in the least hurt me."

But one Sunday morning, when all the world, even smoky Bradfield, was bright with Easter sunshine and gay with Easter flowers—and a very late Easter it was that year—Mr. Pettifer gave out from the desk, as in duty bound, a notice to the effect that the Lord Bishop of the diocese intended, by God's grace, to hold a confirmation in the town of Bradfield, in the month of June ensuing; and all young persons intending to avail themselves of the holy rite were to give in their names as candidates on two certain days in the week then com-

mencing. Of course Nora had never been confirmed, and she wondered greatly whether *mon oncle* expected her to give in her name among the candidates; also she began to wonder whether it was her duty to be confirmed, or to refuse to participate in this ordinance of the Church to which she outwardly belonged. "Papa would not let me be confirmed when I was a little girl," she said to herself, as she sat musing in her own room that Sunday afternoon; "but then that was the Church of Rome that wanted me to be confirmed, and this of course is different. Still, to be confirmed in any Church is openly to embrace its doctrines, and to profess one's self of its communion, and I do not think I could make myself a professed member of this very curious Church of England, which is obliged to get all its bishops together before it can tell what it believes. Well, if they will say nothing I will say as little. But I do not think I ought to be confirmed just because I am bidden. I am not a child; neither, so far as I can learn, was the rite of confirmation intended for children, for *mon oncle* said this morning, in the congregation, that the candidates must be sixteen years of age, and I shall be nineteen in August. I must think about it, and I hope God will tell me what to do, for there is no one I can very well take counsel with, except Dr. and Mrs. Bethell, and I think I would like to decide without appealing to them, or to any one. I think at my age such a matter ought to lie between my own soul and God."

Wednesday was the day on which the female candidates were to send in their names to the pastor; and as Wednesday passed without any special reference to herself, Nora began to hope that her relatives had the wisdom to let her alone. But on Thursday morning, while practising a very difficult piece of *Bach*, Mr. Pettifer came into the drawing-room with a slip of paper, and a pencil in his hand. He waited till Nora had finished the passage, and then he said, hurriedly, and, as it seemed to her, with an assumed indifference of tone, "My dear, you did not give me your name yesterday; I suppose you thought, considering our relations, that it was unnecessary; but it is best to be accurate under any circumstances; there is nothing like method and arrangement. This is

the confirmation list; I add your name, which, by the bye, ought to stand first, instead of last, as a matter of course. Your real name is Leonora, is it not?"

"Yes! but, *mon oncle*, I wish not to be confirmed."

"Do you know what you are saying, Nora?"

"Perfectly, *mon oncle;* I have thought much of what I would say, supposing you urged upon me this rite of confirmation; and I say that I would rather not come forward as one of your candidates. If you desire me to state my reasons I will; but I think you know them, and it would be better, on many accounts, that nothing more should be said between us on this topic."

"This is the doing of your friends the Stanleys," said Mr. Pettifer, losing his temper—a loss to which he was perpetually subject, poor man. "Ah, I know these Dissenters! I know how they work in secret, and strive to undermine the foundations of the faith, in which our Holy Church brings up her children. I know them, Nora!"

"And I think I know them too. If you imagine any one has led me to this decision, you are wrong. The subject of confirmation has never been mentioned between myself and Annie Stanley; indeed, I have avoided the Stanleys ever since Sunday, lest you should attribute to them an influence which they have not and could not exercise."

"You have talked the matter over with that girl Rhoda, I doubt not. Those who ought to know better have made a mouthpiece of her. Rhoda is easily primed, as I have reason to know."

"Once for all, *mon oncle*, Rhoda has nothing to do with my determination. She and I have never talked on controversial themes; it would not be in the fitness of things so to do: we speak together sometimes on religious subjects, but we do not touch upon those differences which keep us apart as Conformists and Nonconformists. Besides, though I respect Rhoda very much, knowing her to be a Christian girl, I should not be influenced by her in a matter so important. Please to understand, *mon oncle*, that for what I shall say to you, if you make me speak, I am alone responsible."

"It is my duty to require you to speak out, Nora. Will

you leave the piano, and come with me into my study? We can converse more quietly there."

"Certainly I will," said Nora, rising, and putting away her music. And she followed Mr. Pettifer upstairs, not at all like a culprit.

"Now, then," said Mr. Pettifer, "will you tell me your objections to the rite of confirmation? I have no doubt I can combat them, and prove to you how necessary it is that you should be yourself confirmed. Your first defence, no doubt, will be that it is not Scriptural."

"I do not know that I ever thought of confirmation in that light; it was only the other day that it occurred to me that the nonconforming churches did not confirm. I dare say confirmation may be a very good thing; I know Dr. Bethell took a great deal of pains with his candidates two years ago, and he said he thought it was with many the turning-point in their history. Many, he said—I remember it quite well—look back to the period of their confirmation as that in which they resolved, with God's help, to be followers of our Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, no! I do not find fault with your confirmation."

"Why, then, do you refuse to participate in the blessed rite? It cannot be, Nora, that you are resolved to live for this world?"

"I must live for this world, for God has placed me in it, and He expects me to do the best I can with it; but I live also for the world to come, for that other life which will be mine when this is ended, *mon oncle*. I tell you that I count myself the servant of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that I would rather die than live to dishonour His name. I believe that I have given myself to God, and that I am His for time and for eternity."

"Then why not be confirmed, and profess your faith and love to God openly?"

"I have professed my love and faith ever since I felt them, and was sure that I did feel them, and confirmation would cause me to make another profession."

"What other profession?"

"The profession of a member of what you call the Church of England."

"Of what *I* call the Church of England! Really, Nora, you say most extraordinary and most unjusti-

fiable things. The Church of England *is* the Church of England."

"That sounds illogical. It is the Church of England, as by Act of Parliament established; but it is no more the Church of the nation than is Methodism, or any other *ism*."

"The Church of England is no '*ism*,' Nora; it is no sect; it is—*the Church*."

"It is a collection of 'isms' and sects, it seems to me—a sort of theological Noah's ark."

"The ark is, indeed, a figure of the Church."

"Of the Church of Christ! But, *mon oncle*, you, who are of the *Evangelique*, will not tell me that the Church of England is the Church of Christ. Your sect of the Evangelique do at least *say* that all who truly love Christ are of His Church, by whatever name they call themselves. You would not tell me that Quakers, and Methodists, and others are not Christians?"

"Surely I would not. Christians may be in error, you know."

"Then, if they are Christians, they are members of Christ's Church Militant, though they are not members of the Church Episcopal. And so the Church of England is only one part of the Church of Christ, you see."

"Nora, you reason like a woman, and you talk like a girl. Now, to prove to you that you are wrong, let me tell you the true and actual meaning of the word sect, which you misapply so sadly. *Sect* comes from the Latin *seco*, I cut off; *sectus*, cut off. Now, a thing cannot be cut off unless it have a trunk, a root—something from which it is separated and detached. You may cut fifty branches off yonder pear-tree, which, while they remain as they are, are part and parcel of the tree. But, when you have cut them off, the tree itself remains, and it is as much a tree as ever. And so the Church from which the sects have separated themselves is still absolutely the Church and no sect, since, though it has suffered loss in the severance of its misguided members, it is the same as ever, and the true root of all that have so severed themselves. You see, Nora, it is dangerous to talk of what a girl like you cannot possibly understand. You are a clever girl, I grant, but not a classical scholar."

"One need not be a classical scholar to know the Latin

root of the word sect," said Nora, with a little contempt she could not restrain. "Papa taught me a great deal more Latin than that. But, *mon oncle*, words are not always true to their derivation; we no longer call people who live in villages pagans, from *paganus;* neither do we speak of a peasant as a *villain* any more. Thousands of words derived from Greek, Latin, and Teutonic roots have long since lost their first significance. Words seem to me very much like coin; hundreds of years ago there was a piece of money called a penny, and there is a penny to-day, but it does not go far in buying food or clothes as once it did. And the value of a thing is what it really is in the present, and not what it was in former generations. So words, as time passes on, change their meaning, and represent something very different from that which at first, in accordance with their roots, they did represent. And *sect* is just one of these words; it means now a portion, and not a whole, and the Church of England would be just as much a sect, in the true and commonly received meaning of the word, as are Baptists and Methodists and others, if it were not, instead of being one sect, a jumble of several sects, all furiously denouncing each other. For, you know, *mon oncle*, you are very bitter against the people and their minister at St. Augustine's, where they have processions, and use a wafer at the sacrament, instead of bread; and they also hate you, and such as you, most completely; then, you like not Dr. Burrowes, whom you call 'Broad,' and you say he preaches not the Gospel; and you like not my dear Dr. Bethell, and you say hard things of him. Truly your Church is a very curious sort of institution; it is quite a menagerie."

"You think you have proved your point, Nora; but let me tell you it is not so."

"Very well, I am content that you hold me in error; I do not want to argue. It will make no difference what you or I call the Established Church; your saying it is *the* Church does not make it so; and my saying it is a sect, or mixture of sects, does not make it such, if indeed I be mistaken. Only, I grant that the Dissenters did once cut themselves off from the parent stem; and if the gardener should cut those branches off the pear-tree, and plant them, they would become—those of them that were

living branches—trees in themselves. You would not always call them branches, because once upon a time they were cut off; they would be just as much trees as the old pear-tree yonder, and they might even bear better fruit."

"It is useless to argue with you, Nora; you twist and pervert all I say. Once more, to come back from this discursive and most unprofitable talk, on what grounds do you refuse to be confirmed?"

"On the grounds that I will not for mere forms join myself to a Church which I cannot wholly love. I can worship with you, for I like, with a few exceptions, your services, though I believe not what you preach. But I cannot solemnly and publicly pledge myself to the Established Church. Papa taught me that Establishments were a grand mistake, and that they worked mischievously; if anybody is at all answerable for what I say now, it is my dear papa, who studied these subjects very closely."

"Your papa, Nora, was not a religious man."

"*Mon oncle*, if you say that again, I will talk to you no more. My blessed papa was a true Christian man—he was what people call 'peculiar,' I can see that now; but if he held some extreme notions, he was driven to them by the dreadful doctrines of that Bunn man, and by the stern teachings of his mother, which were thundered in his ears when he was young. But my papa loved and trusted God, and walked in His ways, and He is now with God, and knows what you and I cannot know till we come to the assembly of the saints. And my dear papa died in charity with all men."

"Do you know what you are doing in refusing the ordinance of confirmation? Do you know that by so refusing you wilfully shut yourself out from what is even of more importance than confirmation—I mean the communion of the Lord's Supper? I suppose, with all your schismatic tendencies, you will not dare to say that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is not a means of grace, which all Christian people are bound—yes! bound to use?"

"I do think that the two sacraments are obligatory, because they were instituted by Christ Himself. There is no doubt about it. He said—'Do this in remembrance of Me.'"

[illegible] unless

[illegible] as in Covid or

[illegible] through her

[illegible] receive the

[illegible] admit

[illegible] complied with

[illegible] away

[illegible] be-

[illegible] with you be-

[illegible] instead of the front-

[illegible] were very impertinent.

[illegible] see your drift, Nora,

[illegible] is not yours, it is

[illegible] My child, I know

[illegible] by what

[illegible] clergyman,

[illegible] to administer the sacra-

[illegible] Church of England."

[illegible] Church was a very bad

[illegible] the worst of

[illegible] permit unconfirmed

[illegible] I know it assuredly."

[illegible] See! it is

[illegible] Order of Confirmation:'

[illegible] admitted to the Holy Com-

[illegible] be confirmed, or be ready

[illegible] Read for yourself. It is

[illegible] may not be broken."

[illegible] foolish and mischiev-

[illegible] Statute-books, and still more

[illegible] obeying them, and no *one*

[illegible] It must be the same with

[illegible] with the laws of the State."

"Dr. Bethell told me. And whenever I have been at St. Oswald's, since this time last year, I have always remained to the communion. If you will not let me stay here, I must try to be at St. Oswald's on the first Sunday in the month, whenever I can. Or I could go to Carvary."

Mr. Pettifer laughed his peculiarly discordant laugh. "They would soon turn you back there, my dear! You must join their church, give in your experience, and be received publicly by the minister, the deacons, and the whole of the members, before you can take their so-called sacrament, which they cannot be certain is any sacrament at all! I tell you, Nora, confirmation, to which you are now invited, is simple and easy compared with the entrance into Dissenting communities. Why, they have *tickets*, which the deacons collect, in order that no person, who is not what they style a church member, may be among the regular communicants! Ask your friends the Stanleys if it is not exactly as I say."

"Were you ever a Dissenter yourself?" asked Nora, innocently.

The question of all others Mr. Pettifer shrank from answering. He did not like to tell a downright lie, especially a lie of which he might afterwards be convicted; and to tell the truth seemed to him simply impossible. He evaded the question, saying in a tone which forbade further remark, "In my early youth I was much thrown among Dissenters; I know something of their discipline, or whatever they may term it."

"You say, ask the Stanleys; I have asked them. Also, Rhoda tells me—for I asked her too—that every Communion Sunday it is given out from the pulpit that all who love Christ, and wish to testify their loyalty to Him—that is the exact phrase, for I have heard it repeated several times, and I took pains to recollect it—*all* who love Christ, of whatever church or communion, are invited to remain. Annie says they have many communicants at Carvary who are not members of their church, and perhaps never intend to be. The only question is, do they profess Christ, and live outwardly in His precepts. A Roman Catholic who truly loved Christ, or a Primitive Methodist, would be alike welcome. And I said to Annie, 'How, then, can you tell that such persons

love Christ?' And she said that, of course, in many cases, that could not be actually ascertained; but the invitation was given, and they who accepted it came on their own responsibility; nor was it likely that people who did not love the Master, at least a little, would care to come to His table. I perceived that she spoke commonsensically."

"There is some mistake," said Mr. Pettifer, stiffly. "Mr. Stanley may be in advance of his creed; such is not the custom in the majority of Nonconformist churches."

"Mr. Stanley says it is, and he ought to know. Dr. Bethell also says it is so. I heard him and Mr. Stanley talk about it the very last evening I spent at the Rectory; that is why I know so well. There are some Baptist churches, I heard them say, which will not let any person into their communion who has not been baptized by immersion. And both the doctor and Mr. Stanley said that these Baptists were every bit as bigoted and unchristian as those in the Establishment who insisted on confirmation."

"Do you mean to tell me that Dr. Bethell does not approve of confirmation?"

"On the contrary, he does approve of it; but he thinks it is quite optional, and ought not to be forced upon any person. He knows I have never been confirmed; nevertheless, he saw no reason why I should not join in holy communion,—you say well when you say he is '*Broad*.' He will not limit God's truth; he will not make rules and distinctions which Christ has not made, and his charity is large."

"I have no time to listen to praises of your favourite, who is both a latitudinarian and a rationalist. Broad! Yes, he is Broad with a vengeance, and so is the way that leadeth to destruction! And it is high time his bishop heard something about his doctrine, and his truly unclerical practices. And Dr. Burrowes is only a very little better; he is more prudent and more reticent—that is all! Once more—do you refuse to come forward as a candidate for confirmation?"

"I do, *mon oncle!* I am sorry if it angers you; but I cannot pretend to believe what I disbelieve. And knowing my sentiments, as you now do, I cannot think that you any longer wish me to prepare for confirmation."

CHAPTER XLI.

CHANGES AT ST. MILDRED'S.

ANOTHER year passed away, and there was a baby at "The Woodlands!" Mr. Pettifer had fondly anticipated a son and heir; Sarah had disappointed him by bringing into the world a little daughter; "but," said Mr. Pettifer, when he called early one morning on Miss Gruesome Greenway to announce the fact of his paternity, "we must be content with what Providence assigns; let us hope it will be one of the right sort next time!"

And truly, so far, the Rev. Charles might well be content with the assignments of Providence. He was much altered since the humble Bellevue days. "The Woodlands" air seemed to suit him exactly; he grew stout, and sleek, and consequential; for his churchwardens bowed down before him, tradesmen were obsequious, and of creature comforts he had his fill. He dressed in handsome clerical costume; and somehow his coats grew longer, his waistcoats higher in the neck, and his white cravat of decidedly unevangelical fashion! The fact being that his "views" were undergoing a most decided change; he was both feeling and evincing certain proclivities towards the High Church.

It was rumoured,—whether truthfully or untruthfully I have no idea,—that Dean Close, when promoted to his deanery, declared to his friends that he found himself growing "higher and higher every day!" That Dean Close ever said anything of the kind is most unlikely, though it was whispered about, with sighs and groans, in certain Evangelical circles, as an undoubted and greatly-to-be-deplored fact. But Mr. Pettifer really did confide to his horrified wife that he was daily becoming more and more disposed towards "a moderate High Churchism!" As I said before, he affected the extreme clerical in his

dress; he took a violent dislike to his Geneva gown, and nearly threw the spinsters of St. Mildred's into fits by preaching in his surplice on Advent Sunday.

It was "the *Mark of the Beast*," they declared! But little he cared for that! He would not have ventured in days past to outrage the opinions of the dominant members of his congregation; he kept his self-assertion chiefly for No. 10, Bellevue, where he could exercise it securely, and without any fear of consequences. It was another thing now: he was a rich man, immensely rich, and, though poverty and imperious assumption will never be permitted to go hand in hand, unlimited wealth, either real or supposed, may be as insolent and arrogant as it pleases. And it did please Mr. Pettifer to "take upon himself," as people said; and he made the churchwardens his creatures, and taught them the duty of submission to priestly authority.

Yes! "*priestly!*" It had come to that! The Rev. Charles Pettifer called himself an Anglican priest! and he was seriously offended when ignorantly classed with Evangelicals. Sarah still read the *Record;* but her husband took in the *Guardian*, and he not unfrequently seized the *Record*, if he found it lying about, crumpled it up, and tossed it away, or actually threw it into the fire. He did this once when his wife was present. She rushed to the rescue; but it was too late—the offending paper had blazed up the chimney. "What can you mean?" she asked, angrily.

"I mean that I will not have that foolish *Record* in my house any longer. It is more than foolish: it is impious, scandalous, and blasphemous!"

And two short years ago the *Record* was to Charles Pettifer as manna to his soul, and as marrow and fatness to his spirit! And once or twice it had inserted his letters, and exalted him to a seventh heaven of complacent vanity. He had called it "that precious *Record!*" Its editor had been "that holy and faithful man!" The sub-editor, the leading contributors, even the printers who were so blessed as to print it, and the small, inky "imps" who were privileged to rush about Fleet Street with its proofs and copy, were sanctified and thrice-honoured mortals. The *Record* office was holy ground, and the *Record* itself was

almost the subject of verbal inspiration. And here he was burning this worshipped organ of the Low Church! No wonder that Sarah threw up her arms, and almost shrieked in her dismay. She would as soon have expected to see him making an *auto-da-fé* of the Bible, as committing to the flames the newspaper in which he had so firmly believed.

"You are going over to Rome, Charles!"

"No, my dear wife, I am not. I do not despise the sister Church—God forbid!—but I prefer to remain in our own communion. You see, as a married man, orders in the Church of Rome would be an impossibility; and I could not sink into a layman. 'Once a clergyman, always a clergyman,' you know. Ordination vows are for life, and a man is perjured if he throw them off. No! I will not forsake my Mother (the Anglican) Church; but I cannot profess the faith of the Evangelicals any longer."

"*Oh, Charles!*" and again Sarah drew up her arms above her head. If she had only been born to the stage, this natural gesture of hers might have been turned to profit; as it was, it made her, as a clergyman's wife, supremely ridiculous. Her want of self-control was continually placing her at disadvantage with her more collected husband.

He replied testily—"My dear! I wish you would not indulge in theatrical demonstrations. It is unbecoming in a woman of your position. Always remember that what was to be overlooked in a mere Miss Lane is not to be tolerated in a Mrs. Pettifer! May I beg you to be less theatrical?"

"*Theatrical!* Charles! I was never in a theatre in all my life. I would as soon go into a house of ill-fame! The theatre is the hot-bed of Satan."

"Indeed! You seem to know all about it Does he hatch his imps there? and from what sort of *ovæ* are they produced? That is a question for Darwin or for Huxley, I should think."

But Sarah was weeping bitterly, and wringing her hands. In spite of her horror of the drama—she would not even read Shakspeare—she was a born actress.

"You burn the *Record*—the faithful witness," she exclaimed, "and you jest about the theatre—nay, you

approve of it! Oh, Charles, how you have deceived me! Oh, why did I ever marry!"

"My love, don't be ridiculous. I have *not* deceived you. A man may see cause to change his opinions, to alter his creed, to profess another faith, surely?"

"But you know, Charles, the Evangelicals hold *the truth*—the very truth, the essence of the truth! It is only they who are right. They are the *true* Church of England."

Charles burst out into one of his most sardonic laughs. "*They* the true Church of England! there is no truth in them! They swear falsely; they subscribe disingenuously; they preach one doctrine at the font, and they set forth another in the pulpit. They say, 'Seeing this child is regenerate;' and they give you afterwards three quarters of an hour of a tirade against the dogma of baptismal regeneration. My dear Sarah, they are wolves in sheep's clothing—these Evangelicals; they have no more right in the Established Church than has Mr. Stanley: they are not half as good as Dissenters; for the Dissenters *are* honest, and won't turn their coats according to the weather. No, I don't sympathise with Nonconformity; I never was farther from it; I detest Nonconformity: it is getting popular, and impudent, and dares us to the combat. But it is *honest*, which Low Churchism is not. It doesn't care for political status, and as for the loaves and fishes—well, somehow, I can't imagine how, it contrives to find plenty of its own. The truth is, Dissent is becoming extremely wealthy, and it is open-handed. And it seems to me, my dear, that in the present day one must be either a true son of the Church of England or a Dissenter. For myself, I infinitely prefer our National Church."

Saul among the prophets could have excited no greater astonishment than the Rev. Charles Pettifer amongst the Ritualists. For very soon he came out as a full-blown, thorough-paced High Churchman; though you must not suppose he went in for a mongrel mass, or for very effective ecclesiastical millinery. People could still find their places in the Book of Common Prayer at St. Mildred's, though there was a good deal of chanting, and genuflexions began to prevail. The old hymn-book was abolished, and the incumbent, at his own expense, provided a modern one for the congregation; and in many respects, I must say,

the change was for the better. The new choir—surpliced, of course, and entirely of the masculine gender—was an undoubted improvement. They sang a trifle too fast, perhaps; but, then, it is fashionable to sing very fast. We have gone from one extreme of drawling, long metres, like *adagio* dirges, to the other of racing through our church canticles to the time of the Mabel waltzes! Still they sang "Pilgrims of the Night" very sweetly and effectively, at St. Mildred's; and on certain days there were certain colours on the communion table—*alias* the *altar*. And Mr. Pettifer varied his scarves occasionally, and talked learnedly about albs, and copes, and chasubles, and began to keep the saints' days, and to have Wednesday and Friday morning prayers, and to limit his sermons to fifteen or twenty minutes' length.

The beast had put his paw on St. Mildred's; that was unquestionable! He could be tracked all over the church, from the golden cross on the embroidered altar-cloth to the notices affixed to the outer doors. And the curate—of course, a man of Mr. Pettifer's standing must keep a curate or two, if only for the sake of respectability—though newly fledged from Oxford, took a still higher flight than his master. With all the rashness of youth, he would have set up a confessional, formed processions, provided banners and costumes after the most approved precedents, and have substituted a wafer for the old accustomed pieces of "good wheaten bread."

But Mr. Pettifer was over forty years of age, and he had plenty of worldly wisdom; therefore, for prudence sake, he restrained the ardent enthusiasm of his youthful coadjutor, who, however, scandalised Arleston generally by going about the streets "in petticoats." Mr. Pettifer might have doubled the scandal by following suit, had not Sarah told him very plainly that if he wore petticoats she would not live with him, except upon compulsion, which all the world should know! And anything like an *esclandre* was to be avoided. Any kind of separation from his wealthy wife was not to be thought of for a moment. So the long, scanty skirts, which ignorant people persisted in calling "petticoats," were not for the present adopted.

One thing very much annoyed Mr. Pettifer—his defec-

tion did not seem to be much deplored by the clergy of Bradfield, who, as a body, were by no means "High." That his 'version would be a "shock to the Evangelicals," he had not doubted; he quite expected a deputation from his brother pastors, seriously remonstrating with him, and imploring him to pause ere he made shipwreck of his soul, or something of that sort; for, of course, he was well-up in Evangelical terminology. But the Evangelicals did not greatly concern themselves about his "convictions;" no one addressed to him any letter of pious remonstrance; no one lifted up against him the voice of denunciation, or pointed at him the finger of scorn. Even the *Record* did not think him worth a paragraph, much less a leader, and that was the cruellest wrong of all. Only his wife and the old maids of St. Mildred's seemed to care at all about his "going over;" and the old maids took themselves elsewhere, and there was an end of the matter.

Sarah could not take herself away, neither do I suppose she wished it. She was much to be pitied in those days, for she loved, as far as it was in her nature to love, her recreant lord and master, most sincerely. She had married him, believing that their views exactly accorded: he was an Evangelical of the Evangelicals, and as such she had gloried in becoming his wedded wife. Now he laughed at her notions, and professed doctrines which filled her with secret dread; he would surely end by going over to Rome; and—what if he were *a Jesuit in disguise?* She had heard and read of such things; her favourite books frequently discussed the subject. Parson Bunn used to shake his head when Jesuits were referred to, and prophesy evil to England, because she fostered the mystery of iniquity in her bosom. Not that he had any but the most hazy ideas about Jesuits and Jesuitism; denunciation is so much easier than argument, and people in Leo Bunn's time were for the most part well content to take such things for granted. And it must be confessed they saved themselves a great deal of trouble in thus comfortably accepting the assertions of their spiritual teachers. Ignorance and credulity passed for faith in those days; and the spirit of fervent inquiry, if it existed at all, stood for heterodoxy.

Sarah dreaded "a Jesuit in disguise" very much as she

dreaded housebreakers. And that Jesuits are to be dreaded, and to be kept at arms'-length, I do not for a moment deny. Sappers and miners are more dangerous enemies than armed battalions in an open field; and Jesuits are the sappers and miners in the subtle warfare conducted by Rome against Protestantism. But an unreasonable fear is childish, and Sarah's idea of Jesuits was solely derived from Leo Bunn's fulminations, and from the literature which of late years she had delighted in. Imagine, then, her horror, her shrinking fear, when she first suspected her Charles of Jesuitism; and she sat and nursed her baby, and shed bitter tears over its father's sad proclivities.

One day she imparted her fears to Nora, who did not share them in the least.

"Oh, no, *ma tante*," she replied, "*mon oncle* is no Jesuit; he is not clever enough to be a Jesuit. He is only ——"

"Only what, Nora? I charge you speak out!"

Mrs. Pettifer, as usual, was growing dramatic under excitement, and quite forgot that she had a sleeping infant on her knees. If Nora had not made a sudden dash, little Miss Pettifer would have had her first downfall in life, and might have suffered grievously from her mamma's carelessness.

"Take care, *ma tante*, or baby will be smashed! Let me hold her."

For Nora was very fond of her tiny cousin, and was never tired of holding her in her arms. She had that passion for babies which is common to most fine-natured, sound-hearted women. Sarah loved her own child, of course; but she loved it not as a child, simply as her own offspring. She had always preferred cats, and even dogs, to babies; and the St. Oswald's folk had set her down long ago as "a predestined old maid;" and but for that half-million of money, an unappropriated blessing she would most probably have remained. Most certainly Charles Pettifer would never have wooed her to be the wife of his bosom; and had he not as Sarah's husband waxed fat and kicked, like Jeshurun—that is to say, waxed rich and arrogant—it is also certain that he would have remained faithful to the *Record*, and to the sect which it represents, to his latest breath.

"He is only *what*, Nora?" implored Mrs. Pettifer, when the baby was comfortably asleep again. "Tell me all you know, and all you guess."

"*Ma tante!* That will involve my saying things to you which you will not like at all, and which may put you in anger against me."

"No, no. Say it all out. If you hide anything from me I shall be angry; and if you deceive me you will be a very wicked and cruel girl."

"I will not deceive you, *ma tante.* But indeed I have nothing to hide. Only I am not sure that I ought to say what I was about to say when you let go baby. Hush, *ma petite! dors-toi, ma petite ange!*" Nora talked French to the baby from the very first. She was quite sure that babies who know no language understand French better than English.

"You were going to say your uncle was not a Jesuit, he was only ——"

"Only silly, *ma tante*, since you will have it."

"Oh, no, Nora; he is not silly, he is very clever!"

"It is well that you should think so, *ma tante.* If I ever have a husband I should like to believe in him. But I do not think *mon oncle* is truly clever. I think he wants to be somebody, and he thinks he is of more importance as a—what is it you call his party?—than if he had remained in the Church. No, he is not gone out of the Church; that seems to me so very odd—I mean than if he had remained just as he was when we first came to live at Arleston. And Dr. Bethell thinks the same."

"Dr. Bethell is not very flattering. What did he say when he heard of Charles's perversion?"

"He laughed, *ma tante;* and he said, 'Oh, rubbish, rubbish! A certain number of men in the English Church must turn Ritualistic every year, for the stream flows that way. But Charles Pettifer will do no harm, except to himself. If I were an Evangelical I should be rather glad of his defection from the cause.' And then he said *mon oncle* had not weight enough to be really mischievous; and if he were only honest it did not so much matter what he called himself."

"I am sure I am much obliged to Dr. Bethell! One would think he took my husband for a simpleton, which

you must know he is not, Nora. You do not take him for an actually weak and silly person? Tell me now."

Sarah had a habit of asking the most infelicitous questions; of urging people to perfect candour, and then resenting it. Nora was aware of this; but she thought it might be better for her aunt if she spoke out what she felt, so she answered, "I would never, no, never, *ma tante*, have given you my opinion unasked; but since you demand it from me, I say that I do believe Mr. Pettifer to be of weak judgment. He is not exactly foolish though, for he is quick to perceive what will be for his own comfort and aggrandisement; and he is decidedly clever at *la ruse*—what you call stratagem. Still, I do not think there is anything serious in this matter. It is rubbish, mere rubbish, all this talk of his. If I were you, *ma tante*, I would let him talk till he was tired. The more he is opposed the greater will be his demonstrations. Perhaps he will be disgusted after awhile, and return upon his steps."

"Perhaps he will turn Roman Catholic, like that Dr. Newman, and that awful man at Mossingley."

"He might do worse, *ma tante*."

"Nora! Nora! are you mad? But I forgot that you are half a Papist yourself. I must not look to you for sympathy."

"*Ma tante*, I am not half, nor the tenth part, of a Papist. I never was further from Popery in my life; I never was more averse to its principles and its spirit than I am to-day. But I don't like half-way houses; and if I went that way—the way *mon oncle* has gone—I would go all the way. I would not stop in one communion while I belonged of right to another. I have a grand respect for Dr. Newman, because he was honest; and a religion that is not honest must be worse than no religion at all."

"Ritualism is not honest," sighed Sarah. "It calls itself the Church of England, and it devours her revenues, while in heart and in practice it is part and parcel of the apostate Church of Rome. Nora, my eyes are opened! This is the thing which will pull down unto the dust our beloved National Church. As the dry-rot in the timbers of a goodly mansion is this Ritualism, which is sapping the strength and vigour of our Church, and holding it up to

shame. I don't know but you are right. An out-and-out Papist is more to be trusted and respected than a specious Ritualist, who is a traitor within the camp! Your uncle said to me this morning, 'We shall, in process of time, indoctrinate the whole Church of England. Let us only get the young into our hands—let only educational power be ours, as we quite intend it shall be—and our work is done, and the Church of England once more restored to the status and the glory of which it was deprived by the undue zeal of the Reformers, and by the so-called Evangelical movement of the last century.' To think of Charles's sneering at the Reformers and crying down the Evangelical movement!—Charles, whose doctrine was so sound, who has always opposed himself to Romanism, and who has pledged himself in a thousand ways to the party he has so suddenly deserted. Nora, the Ritualists have no business in the Church of England."

"The Evangelicals have not, *ma tante*. So long as your Prayer-book remains as it is, the Ritualists will always get the best of it."

"They go beyond it; though Charles says they do not exceed the Rubric and Canon Law. I know there are things in the Prayer-book that we, who hold the pure faith, cannot take in a literal sense—baptismal regeneration, for instance. But still it would not do to touch the Prayer-book. There is no knowing where it would end, if once alterations were permitted."

"*Ma tante*, if you take an ugly brick or two out of a good sound wall, it will be none the worse; but, if you take the same bricks out of another wall, that is crumbling with age, and tottering to its fall, you will most likely pull the whole thing down about your ears. I read lately the 'Life of Dr. Arnold,' and I find him saying on this very subject of Revision, 'If we will not be reformed, I am afraid we shall be mangled.'"

"And mangled we are!" said Sarah mournfully. "I am sure the High Church services are mangled; I hardly know what I am doing on Sunday mornings when they make that dismal noise they call intoning. Mary and Martha told me they must leave St. Mildred's; they have not been there for three Sundays; Martha has taken a sitting at the old church—she likes Dr. Burrowes; and

Mary thinks she will join the 'Brethren,' as they Pharisaically style themselves. I suppose they are good people, but I must say I do not like what I have seen of them."

"I suppose they are neither better nor worse than other religious sects! I don't like what I call the publican-pharisee spirit in them. And they are very mischievous in breaking up churches, I am told. They mean well, no doubt: but they do a great deal of harm one way or other. And oh, how they do quarrel among themselves! They are worse than the Church of England in this respect; for High and Low and Broad will all meet at the Master's table; while these naughty 'Brethren' will not 'break bread' with those of their own sect, from whom they happen to differ on some article of faith. There are some who follow a Mr. Newton,—I think that is his name,—and some who follow another man; and they will have no dealings with each other. I suppose when they get to heaven they will just shake hands and say 'What narrow-minded simpletons we were!' Mary Grice is going to belong to the set that is opposed to Mr. Newton and his followers. She told me all about it; she said she had decided not only to leave St. Mildred's but to leave the Established Church entirely. And she is much grieved that Martha is of another spirit."

"Miss Gruesome Greenway is leaving too; she says she does not know where to go; she is a sheep without a fold and without a shepherd. She is very severe on Charles, and she hinted pretty plainly that I had led him astray."

"Well, *ma tante*, that was an unjust accusation. But I do think, if Mr. Pettifer had remained a poor man, it would have been better for him. I think he would have remained of the *Evangelique*, if he had not become the sharer of your wealth."

"And oh, dear, Nora, he is spending such a lot of money! Only this morning he asked me, quite coolly, for £500, and absolutely refused to tell me for what! For charitable purposes, *he said*."

"Perhaps he is going to found a sisterhood; he was talking about it the other day; I heard him telling Miss Stampaway that there was a suitable house to be let in Bell Street. And Miss Stampaway—Miss Charlotte, I mean—said that it would be better to purchase it."

"Sisterhoods, indeed!" burst out Sarah, quite savagely. "And he will play father-confessor, I suppose! He shall have none of my money for such a purpose. I am not going to have him philandering with a set of silly women."

Sarah had found out, somehow, that her husband could, and did "philander." And the discovery by no means pleased her. She did not, in her own mind, suspect him of anything worse than "nonsense," but, as was quite natural, she did not like the idea of such nonsense. She did not approve of clerical flirting, especially when the cleric was her own private property; and she had suffered mild attacks of jealousy on more than one occasion. She was determined that no sisterhood should be attached to St. Mildred's, if she could possibly prevent it, and she thought she could; though, at the expense, probably, of a serious altercation. She was very glad she had not yielded in the matter of the £500. She was getting used now to the disbursement of large sums, but it always went to her heart to fill up a cheque for any considerable amount. Mr. Pettifer found out very soon after his marriage that his wife loved money for its own sake, and that she was of an intensely jealous disposition. This was most unfortunate; for he loved spending money, and his flirting propensities were almost sure to excite the displeasure of any woman less meek and less trusting than poor departed Ruth.

CHAPTER XLII.

NORA'S SECRET.

BUT, after all, Mr. Pettifer did get the £500 from his wife—not, however, till they had fiercely quarrelled for the space of an hour or more; she reproaching him with having married her for her money; he taunting her with being a miser, and the daughter of a wretched old miser. They exchanged recriminations of the most pointed character, and they expressed themselves in terms more forcible than elegant. And yet Mr. Pettifer won the day, and Sarah signed the cheque, on the distinct understanding that the money yielded should not in whole, or in part, be applied to the establishment or to the maintenance of any sort of religious institution.

Mr. Pettifer promised faithfully that not one shilling of the £500 should find its way to any place of the kind; but he still obstinately refused to explain what he intended to do with the money; and he hinted that he should very quickly need, and demand, a fresh supply. Sarah held her breath with indignation and amazement; and when she was indignant and surprised she looked by no means handsome. Her whole face became of a deep, dull, fixed red; her eyes dilated, and her jaws fell so as to leave her mouth wide open. The Rev. Charles laughed heartily, and coarsely exclaimed, "Good heavens! what an idiot you do look like! And I never thought any woman could be so ugly!"

This was a most cruel thrust, for Sarah thought very highly of her personal appearance; she really believed that she had some claims to actual beauty, though it was difficult to understand how she could be so deluded. And Charles—base man—had often complimented her on her good looks in the days gone by. She was almost inclined to snatch the hardly-surrendered cheque out of his

hand, and tear it into fifty pieces. She wished afterwards that she had done so.

Further retorts were, of course, the result of Mr. Pettifer's ungallant remarks, and it seemed as if the quarrel could not cease. At last Mr. Pettifer folded up the cheque, and placed it carefully in his pocket-book, observing that he should go at once to the bank and get it cashed.

"And really, Sarah," he said, as he buttoned up his coat, as a sign that the conversation must terminate, "if you will only reflect, like a rational woman—which I am afraid, though, you are not, and never can be—you would perceive how reasonable are my demands. Do you not know that a wife's property is her husband's? I cannot, it is true, lay my hands on the principal, but I can, as your lord and master, spend every farthing of your yearly income; and I may as well tell you, my dear, that I intend to assert my just rights. I hoped you would have had the good sense, and the good taste, to make such arrangements as would render me independent of yourself. Is it in the fitness of things that I, your lawful husband, should humble myself to ask you for a cheque every time I want a few paltry hundreds or thousands?"

"*Thousands!*" shrieked Sarah, looking as wild as a pythoness. It was bad enough when he wrung hundreds from her; but if it came to thousands! Well! he should have her heart's blood as soon as he should have her money by thousands! Oh! how thankful she was that Mr. Salisbury had taken the precautions he did; if it had not been for her own rash folly he would have secured her from much which she now apprehended might befal her.

"Yes, *thousands!*" returned Charles with emphasis. "Your money is accumulating most ridiculously. *Our* money, that is; for, of course, all that is yours is mine now, understand. I mean henceforth that we shall live up to our income. We will make ourselves happy, my love, and spend at least £20,000 a year for the future."

And before Sarah could recover sufficient composure to make any rejoinder he had left the room, with that smile on his face which she had begun to be afraid of. Of course she poured out all her griefs to Nora, who was heartily sorry for her, but little able to advise her. "If I

were you, aunt," she said, "I would go and have a long confidential talk to Mr. Salisbury. If any one can secure you from that which threatens it is he."

"It would be the most prudent course, I admit, Nora; but I confess I shrink from applying to Mr. Salisbury. I was very short with him at the time of our marriage; he told me plainly that I was doing a very foolish thing. No one likes to be proved in the wrong, and if I go with my troubles to Mr. Salisbury, I admit myself to have been mistaken, and own that he was in the right."

"*Ma chère tante*, he was in the right, and you were in the wrong. If one has made a mistake—and who has not?—the best way is to acknowledge it, and, if possible, apply a remedy. But the evil increases so long as you refuse to own yourself in error. Besides, Mr. Salisbury will not be too hard upon you. He is a kind, good man. He will place a check upon Mr. Pettifer, if he can; but I do know that married men have great rights, and I have been told that if a woman does not get her property settled before her marriage she cannot do it afterwards."

"That is too true!—though perhaps Mr. Salisbury may be able to devise some scheme. You see, by my father's will, the principal—the actual half-million which he left behind him—is tied upon me and my heirs for ever. If I had not married, you would have been my heiress, Nora; for, save a few distant cousins, relatives of my mother, you were the only person in the world with whom I could count kin, till I became a wife and a mother. But I can leave my money how I please, I believe, and I will make my will at once; and you shall not be without proper provision, I promise you."

"I thank you much, *ma tante;* but is it certain that you can make a will? I have been told that the English law permits not to a married woman that she should make a will."

"Generally speaking, it is so; and in that respect the law wants mending. But my money is entirely my own; it is so left that I can will it away to whom I please. I might leave it to hospitals and lunatic asylums, if I chose, or build a cathedral. I might leave it all to Mr. Pettifer, or to baby, or to yourself. If I die intestate, I am not sure but that my husband takes *all;* and I wish to prevent

that. You and I will go and see Mr. Salisbury to-morrow."

"Would it not be better, *ma tante*, that your conversation with Mr. Salisbury should be strictly private?"

"We will think about that when we are there. I wish you to hear some things. I wish to say a few words to you in Mr. Salisbury's presence. At any rate, you shall accompany me to the office; then, if it seems advisable that we should confer together without an auditor, you can go and do a little shopping at Townley's. You may have that grey silk you fancied the other day."

"You are very good, *ma tante;* and if baby is to have her short frocks, it might be as well to go to Hudson's."

"We will leave baby's things to another opportunity. I did buy her a pelisse last week. Yes, she must be shortened, as we say, very soon now, because the weather may turn chilly suddenly. We are in September, you know. It will soon be four years since you came to me, Nora. I am afraid I was not as kind to you then as I might have been. The truth is, I was brought up—oh, I cannot tell you how! stupidly, cruelly, wickedly! I lived in the house of bondage. Nora, I had been in slavery all my life, and I am afraid I wanted you to be in slavery too; and I had no notion of justice, nor, indeed, of any kind of real goodness. I am beginning to see things differently, and I hope I may do very differently for the remainder of my life. But you must have patience with me, Nora, for I am not naturally amiable; indeed I am afraid I have a wretched temper, and I am easily offended; and I require from people more than I should ask or expect. And my religion, too, has been of the wrong sort: that is just dawning on my mind; so that I seem to have no refuge, and no resting-place. And my husband, in whom I trusted, he is—— Oh, Nora, I am so bitterly disappointed in him; and I *did* love, Nora: indeed, I love him now! You know I love him, though he tells me so coarsely that I only married him to escape being an old maid!"

And the poor woman burst into tears, and cried hysterically, and it was long before Nora could comfort her. An hour or two afterwards, awaking from a troubled sleep, Mrs. Pettifer said, "Nora, I should like to have

your promise that you will never leave me. I am sure you are too sensible to mind the foolishness that people talk about old maids. I wish you would make up your mind never to marry. I will take care while I live that you shall have all you want, and, after my death, you will inherit at least a quarter of my riches, which do accumulate, and shall accumulate, for live at the rate Mr. Pettifer proposes, *I will not!*"

Nora was much afraid that her aunt would be compelled to live at any rate that Mr. Pettifer chose. And he was just the man to cajole or frighten her into signatures which might make over to him the principal even of his wife's fortune. Nora had heard and read of such things, and she resolved to keep a close watch upon *mon oncle*, if he said anything about signing papers that were mere formalities, and of no great consequence, though that her aunt would be mad enough to sign anything which she had not carefully read and did not entirely comprehend she could not believe. Mrs. Pettifer was not only a very wide-awake, but a very suspicious person when there was any money in the question; and so matters stood; it was quite as well that it should be so. Still Mr. Pettifer had great influence, and a certain power over his wife; in all the conflicts which had raged between them, from the night of their coming home from the wedding journey, ere the honeymoon was over, until now, when they had some kind of quarrel or difference nearly every day, he had always been the conqueror; somehow, by scolding or taunting, or flattering, or arguing, he always gained his point. It made Nora very uneasy, as she reflected how much her aunt had already conceded, and how much more she might be forced to yield. But of this she said nothing; she simply replied—"At present, *ma tante*, there is no question of my leaving you. And I promise you that I will not, while you live, fulfil the threat which once in my wrath I uttered. I will not, for any disagreeableness or unkindness even of *mon oncle*, go away and earn a living for myself."

"And you will never *marry?* Promise me that, Nora!"

"*Ma tante*, I could not make such a promise; it would not be right." And Nora's face and neck were scarlet as she bent over her needlework.

"See what I have gained by marriage! How happy you and I might have been here, by ourselves, had I not committed the folly of sacrificing my liberty. You know the old song, child?—'Men were deceivers ever,'—and it is true, quite true!"

"*Mais non, ma tante,* I think not so. There are men who deceive, I know well, and there are women also who deceive. But there are men who are quite true: men quite unlike Mr. Pettifer; men whom any woman might trust and not be disappointed. All marriages do not turn out unhappily! Look at Dr. and Mrs. Bethell; they have passed their silver-wedding day, and they are lovers still! And Annie tells me that her father and mother, who are getting quite old people, are as fond of each other as if they were lately married. Then my own dear papa; ah! how he worshipped my *chère maman!* Louison used to say that he worshipped *ma maman* instead of the Virgin Mary! That was nonsense, of course; but his love for his wife was very great, and the last thing he ever said was something about her. Ah, *ma tante,* believe it not that all marriage is unhappy. The good God made people to marry, and to love each other."

"Nora!" and Mrs. Pettifer spoke gravely, and looked keenly at her niece, "there is more in this than comes to the surface. There is some one whom you are thinking of. You have seen some one whom you would like to marry. Though *who* it can be I cannot imagine! Surely not that empty-headed young Stampaway, who persists in coming here evening after evening, in spite of the cold shoulder?"

Nora laughed. "No, indeed, *ma tante:* I like not boys! Ned Stampaway is not much older than myself, and he has not half as much sense as I have; indeed, I think he is rather what you call *brainless.* When I marry, it will be to some one in every sense my superior. I must sit at my husband's feet, or else remain unmarried."

"Which would be by far the wiser alternative. Nora, you *have* some one in your head! Don't tell me you have not! I see it in your face, and in those guilty blushes! You have some attachment!"

"*Ma tante,* I have no engagement; let that suffice

you. No one has spoken to me of love. No one has asked me to be his wife, after the English custom, which I once thought so strange, but which I now approve. Be sure I will keep no secret from you."

"But you are keeping a secret from me, Nora! You know you are—you have an attachment."

"And if I have, *ma tante*—which I do not, however, admit—I have a right to my own secret. If you were my mother I would say the same words to you. If I have an attachment, as you say, I will tell no living creature. It would be most indelicate and improper, it seems to me, to speak on such a subject."

"No good ever comes of a clandestine love affair, Nora. And I am surprised and pained at the opinions you express."

"*Ma tante*, I have no *affaire-de-cœur*—I mean no love affair; for I have no lover. I promise you, the moment I have one, I will let you know. I shall hide nothing from you, be assured. I am not quite sure, though, that Ned Stampaway does not make some kind of appearance of being my *pretendu*; but he is just a foolish, tiresome boy, and if you will prevent his coming so often, I shall be glad. He spoils my evenings, and makes me feel cross and unladylike, and so I *snub* him. That is a funny little word, 'snub,' but it says a great deal."

"Well, Nora, I suppose I must be content. As you assure me that you have no lover I must believe you. Indeed, I do not see how you can have a lover without my knowing it. Dr. Bethell's eldest son is engaged, you tell me, or else ——"

"Arthur Bethell and I are very good friends; but I have known of his engagement from the beginning, and I have been introduced to his *fiancée*, Mildred Hamilton. They will be married as soon as he can secure what the elders hold to be a proper income. He is a medical man, you know, and his father will buy him a London practice as soon as he can hear of one that seems quite satisfactory."

"How strange that Dr. Bethell's eldest son should not be in the Church!"

"Do you think so, *ma tante?* Such things are not hereditary—or ought not to be."

"And yet, I am told, there is a very good living in the Bethell family, and the present incumbent over seventy."

"That was one reason, I fancy, why Dr. Bethell never encouraged his son to think of entering the Church. He does not approve of the way livings are managed. Walter is studying for the Indian Civil Service; so, unless little Herbert should embrace his father's profession, there will not be a clergyman in the next generation of the Bethells."

"Well, I think it is very strange. Still, I do think very differently of Dr. Bethell from what I once did. My views have altered so much during the last few months, that I hesitate to pronounce judgment continually. I am not sure that I could listen to my old pastor, Mr. Bunn, if he came back again—which, luckily, he cannot—he would be so appalled at the changes which have taken place during the last five-and-twenty years. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the Evangelicals must be right in the main. I wish they were not quite so positive. Oh, dear! there is Mr. Pettifer at the gate. I will go to the nursery before he comes in. I dare say we shall not speak to each other to-night."

CHAPTER XLIII.

WHAT HAPPENED ON THE GREAT MOOR ROAD.

WHETHER the married pair at "The Woodlands" held any private communication that night I am not able to record; but in Nora's presence they certainly did not exchange the smallest greeting, or take the slightest notice of each other. Charles looked provokingly self-complacent at breakfast-time, and he engaged in a lively conversation with Nora—if that can be called a conversation which consisted of a series of sprightly remarks on the one side, and mere assent, and sometimes silence, on the other. Sarah was

grim and glum, and never looked towards her husband. She, too, interchanged a few sentences with her niece; Nora was really a very useful person that morning. But for her the amiable couple would probably have taken their morning meal without the utterance of a word, and everybody knows how awkward that kind of thing is, especially when servants are present.

Breakfast was nearly over, and Nora was sugaring her uncle's last cup of coffee,—he liked sugar, as he liked all other sweets—when he looked up suddenly at Eastlake, the man-servant, and addressed him thus:—"Eastlake!"

"Yes, sir."

"Eastlake, I am going from home to-day, and I shall most probably remain out all night. Put up the two or three things that I shall require in the new bag, and carry it down to St. Mildred's, to my private rooms."

"Yes, sir. Shall I include any change of dress, sir?"

"No. Only just what is wanted for a single night. I shall be home before the evening service."

"Yes, sir."

"And, Eastlake, tell the cook that she may send in cold grouse, or grouse-pie, every morning, till she has further orders. And she is not on any account to omit the mushrooms."

"Very well, sir. At what time shall I carry down your bag?"

"Immediately!—that is, as soon as you have carried out the breakfast. At any rate the bag must be there no later than eleven o'clock."

Mrs. Pettifer drank her coffee in quiet gulps, and maintained an impenetrable and ominous silence. She felt herself outraged, and she was not unreasonable, all things considered. Decidedly a husband ought not to remain out all night, the wife of his bosom being in utter ignorance of his whereabouts; and to have the fact announced as Mr. Pettifer announced it, through orders given to a domestic, is certainly to add insult to injury. Sarah naturally felt herself insulted, but she said no word.

Breakfast being quite over, Mr. Pettifer rose, and, with a smiling adieu to Nora, left the room, and very speedily left the house. "It is quite as well," said Mrs. Pettifer, when she and her niece were alone. "His conduct is just

abominable; it is not even respectable. Still, we shall have the day to ourselves. We will take an early luncheon, you and I, and then we will go into the town and see Mr. Salisbury, and put things in train, at least. I shall give him strict orders to complete everything as quickly as possible, for I shall not feel easy now till I have made my will and signed it, with all due attestation, and whatever is required. Then, if we are not too tired, we may have a sandwich and a glass of wine at Cooke's, and take the rail to Ashford. I want to see old Mrs. Morrison. And we will come back as suits us to a meat tea, and leave out dinner altogether."

"Very well, *ma tante*. It is a beautiful day. At what time will you order the carriage?"

"I shall not go in the carriage at all, Nora. I do not wish any one to be aware of our business in Bradfield, and servants always contrive to get an inkling of things. We will walk to the Pentangle, and take a car from there to the Town Hall; then it is not many yards to Mr. Salisbury's office. I only hope he may be in, and disengaged; it would have been better to make an appointment."

As Mrs. Pettifer performed no more maternal duties than she could avoid, it was quite easy to leave the little one in her nurse's charge. Miss Pettifer, like the hero of "Great Expectations," was "brought up by hand." When our old friend Mrs. Lupin heard of the arrival of Sarah's baby, she lifted up her hands and exclaimed, "To think of Sarah Lane having a baby! It is too ridiculous! What will she do with it?" And when she was told by Martha Grice, who came St. Oswald's way every now and then, that the child was to be dry-nursed, she replied, "A good thing too! If Sarah must bring unfortunate infants into the world, the least kindness she can bestow upon them is *not* to nurse them herself. Children mostly take after their fathers; but mother's milk gives mother's nature, and it is best that such a nature as Sarah's should not be transmitted to posterity. Though I always say a woman who can't or won't nurse her babies in the natural way is not qualified for matrimony." So little Minnie was fed on "tops and bottoms," and revalenta, and prepared flour, which was a very good thing for her; for Mrs. Lupin, though not entirely

charitable in her conclusions, was quite right in her premises. The less Baby Minnie resembled her mamma, the better it would be for her. As to her papa, it was to be hoped she would "take after" him as little as possible.

Sarah and Nora reached Mr. Salisbury's office shortly before noon, and there they met with their first disappointment. The lawyer's confidential clerk saw the ladies, and deplored the absence of his superior. Mr. Salisbury had started that morning for London, on very important business—he would not be back before the beginning of the week. Could he do anything for Mrs. Pettifer?

But Mrs. Pettifer had no idea of entrusting her business to a clerk, however reliable. Indeed, as she really wished Mr. Salisbury's advice in the first place, she could not easily give the proper instructions. "We had better make an appointment, my dear," she said to Nora. "Will next Tuesday morning at this hour suit Mr. Salisbury, do you suppose, Mr. Grey? Tell him that my business is urgent and must not be postponed a day longer than is absolutely needful."

"I *am* disappointed! I *am* vexed!" said Sarah, when they came out of doors again, rubbing her nose, on which a large "Bradfield-black" had just settled. "I don't feel a bit inclined to go to Ashford, now; Mrs. Morrison will be out, too; I feel as if she would! And I don't want to go home again, just yet, I am so nervous and unsettled. I wish we lived near some pretty country place, where we could go and spend a few hours quietly. Come into Cooke's and let us talk it over."

Nora felt how much her aunt was improved. A year or two ago she would certainly have vented her annoyance upon her niece, and have doubted the accuracy of Mr. Grey's statements. Cooke's "Ladies'-room" was nearly empty, so Nora and her aunt had a quiet nook to themselves, where they could talk comfortably. "There is Prior's Spa?" suggested Nora, taking up the railway guide, which lay beside her plate.

"Too far! too far!" replied Sarah; "and the trains do not run frequently."

"Oh, *ma tante*, I know what I should like; but I am afraid it would not suit you. The trains are sure to be all

Sarah looked and started. There, with the very black bag in his hand which Eastlake had carried to St. Mildred's some hours before, stood a man—he scarcely looked at all like a gentleman—knocking at the door of a common-place little house, the entrance-room of which was used as a sort of genteel shop, for there were a few fancy articles in the window. The man in question wore a shabby, ill-fitting grey suit, a slouching old wide-awake, and smoked spectacles!

"Yes," said Sarah, faintly, sinking back, "it *is* your uncle, Nora."

CHAPTER XLIV.

NO. 7, LABURNUM TERRACE.

"PLEASE, mum, they don't know no Mrs. Sparkler at the shops, neither at the baker's nor yet at the greengrocer's. I should think the party have moved right away," said the cabman, returning from his quest which his metamorphosis of Mrs. Peglar's name had, of course, rendered unsuccessful.

"Never mind," said Mrs. Pettifer, sitting up, and looking ghastly pale; "drive on to Dringfield."

Nora looked at her aunt to ascertain whether she were in full possession of her senses. What could they do at Dringfield? They knew no one there, and they could not have any business in the stupid little town, which was only an overgrown village. "Yes, we must go somewhere," said Sarah, answering her niece's puzzled glance. "I must think; I must resolve what to do; we must talk this matter over. We will go to the best inn in the place, and have some tea. I want something to drink; I am parched. I could not call upon Mrs. Peglar now, even if I could find her."

And so the man mounted the box once more, and drove on along the Great Moor Road to Dringfield, at the entrance of which he stopped for further orders. He was desired to convey his fare to the most respectable inn the place afforded. "There isn't no inns to speak of in Dringfield," replied Jehu; "there's several decent publics, though none of 'em is quite fit for ladies—that is, for *real* ladies. There is the 'Blue Pig' and the 'Game Cock'—that *is* rayther low, I fancy; and there's the 'Chough and Crow.' Now, that is a tidyish house, when it ain't fair-time nor club-night; and they draws a good tap, they do. I think I'd better take you there, as I can bait my horse, which can't go much further, poor beast, and get a drop o' drink myself."

And in five minutes Sarah and Nora were safely bestowed in a stuffy "private parlour" of the "Chough and Crow," which had been a respectable coaching-house in the days gone by. The room smelt of stale tobacco-smoke, and an odour of beer, spirits, gas, and sawdust came up from below. The walls were hung with dingy brown paper; the low ceiling was almost black; the table was smeared and sticky; and the gaselier and mirror-frame were dressed in dirty yellow leno. Prints of famous racers and the portrait of a rubicund stage-coachman-looking man in oil-painting, a japanned tea-tray with a mother-of-pearl church upon it, and a Britannia-metal tankard were the ornaments of this charming apartment. Nora never forgot the private parlour of the "Chough and Crow."

Sarah tossed off her bonnet, and threw back her mantle, as if she gasped for fresh air. "Open the window," she said faintly, as she sank into a greasy arm-chair. "How very close it is!"

Nora obeyed, and, taking off her hat, sat down on a cumbrous and most uneasy horsehair sofa, wondering what was to come next.

"Now, then, what shall I do?" said Sarah, suddenly sitting bolt-upright, and shutting her mouth, as if it were a steel trap, the moment she had spoken.

"Are you sure it was Mr. Pettifer, *ma tante?*"

"Am I sure that I am sitting in this filthy old chair? Am I sure that we came from Bradfield to Wolverham to-day? Am I sure that I am looking at and speaking to

you, Nora Lane, and that we are both in a low, vulgar public-house at Dringfield? Don't ask me if I am 'sure'! I'd swear to him this moment! That man, who looked as low, and mean, and wicked, and disreputable as any escaped gaol-bird, was your uncle and my husband, the Rev. Charles Pettifer. So he goes about in disguises, does he? A pretty clergyman! The Church of England is come to something; but the question is, whether he really is a clergyman at all, or a low, cheating impostor! An impostor he must be! Respectable, *true* men don't go about in scamping wide-awakes and smoked spectacles. Oh, the wretch! Oh, what will become of me!"

And Sarah threw up her hands in her usual wild, excited way, and spoke so loudly and so vehemently that Nora was terrified lest the people below should suppose it necessary to put in an appearance.

"Hush! I entreat thee; be calm, *ma tante!*" she exclaimed, rising, and taking her aunt's hands in her own. "Remember, we are not at home—not in a very nice place; we must be quite sage, and perfectly discreet. Let us talk it over quite quietly. Now, then, why did you come here?"

"That I might think and consult with you, and determine as to what it would be best and right to do next."

"Very well, *ma tante.* I perceive that this is what one calls a *crisis.* Only let us be very guarded: no person down there must know who we are, or anything about us."

"Certainly not."

"Then you must be quieter, calmer, or they will guess, if they do not know, things. Now, *ma tante,* may it not be that all is as it ought to be? May not *mon oncle* have cause to come here on his lawful business, and may he not pay visits, which, though inexpedient, shall yet be inculpable?"

"It cannot be inculpable," replied Sarah, catching at Nora's idiom, "to prowl about in *disguise.* It is not consistent with his clerical obligations, it is unbefitting his position, it is not commonly respectable,—to walk the public streets in an assumed character—and such a character! Ah, Nora, I am more than ever convinced that he is a Jesuit—or else a gambler!"

"Never mind forming an opinion just now. We are at

Dringfield, and as you say, in a low public-house." Nora excessively disliked the situation, and hoped Ernest Stanley might never know that she had taken refuge at the "Chough and Crow." "When we have had our tea—such tea as it will be; they will think we ought to have called for whisky—we must go away. Do you wish to make any inquiries at the place where they sell traced muslin, and mock jewellery, and brandy-snaps?"

"I can't go back to Wolverham, Nora, till I have been into that house, and seen the persons who live there. I watched my husband go in; I have a right to call, and demand to see him, and know his business at 7, Laburnum Terrace, Great Moor Road. I did not take down the address; there was no need; it is burnt into my memory."

"I think you have a right to go to that house into which *mon oncle* has entered. I am sure that I should go, for I cannot bear to leave things to uncertainties, and suspicions are so often far beyond realities. Perhaps, after all, it will come to nothing of any consequence."

"It will come to this—that my husband, whom I trusted, and whom I loved, keeps secrets from me. And I tell you, Nora, when there are secrets between husband and wife, there can be no married happiness. I feel at this moment as if the ground were slipping away under my feet. I found out some months ago that I had made the worst mistake that a woman can make; but I did not suspect the existence of a mystery, of an intrigue such as I am assured I have this day discovered. Suppose he has another wife; suppose that woman whom he goes to see—for I feel positive it is a woman he visits—suppose she is the real Mrs. Pettifer! And I am—*what*, Nora? And what is that poor, dear, innocent little child?"

"*Ma tante*, you are supposing absurdities. If you are not Mr. Pettifer's lawful wife, then was that poor dear Ruth no wife of his. And I think not that he is *vile*, as such shocking conduct would prove him to be. I think he is weak, and vain, and ignorant, and his head has got turned with prosperity, and he has not great principle; but that he is capable of so dreadful wickedness as you hint at I cannot believe. I do think his strange behaviour may be explained, and I think it is

not too much that you should require an explanation. The wife has her rights, though she be in subjection to her husband; just as children have their rights, you know, though they are bidden to obey their parents. Obligations of any sort can never be on one side only."

Just then a smart but untidy young woman threw open the door with a bang, and bore in the tea equipage. Aunt and niece necessarily kept silence while the befrilled damsel arranged the table and inquired whether the ladies would like a relish with their cup of tea—say a bloater, or a rasher, or a hegg, or a dash of brandy; "for yer ma, miss," continued the voluble, red-handed Hebe, "do look right bad; she 've gone an' overtired herself, I should say. Now, there's nothing like a sup of Old Tom in your tea, when you are dead beat, like! Just try it!"

"No, thank you," said Nora, civilly, wondering what "Old Tom" was made of. Was it a sort of vulgar sal-volatile? "Tea and bread and butter is all we require." The bread and butter Nora knew was only a pretence; she had no appetite, and she was sure her aunt could not swallow a morsel, though she had already asked for water, and was drinking it as if she had been seven days in the desert.

"Have a mild reddish and a young onion," persisted the damsel; "and there's shrimps to be got handy."

But the ladies wanted neither salad nor shellfish; they only wished to be left alone; and, after some further parley, the woman, who was curious enough to know what "such as they" wanted in a public like the "Chough and Crow," consented to go down without any extension of the bill of fare, banging the door as she departed.

Nora began to pour the tea out of the battered, leaden-looking pot. The tea was black, and the milk was blue, and the sugar was whity-brown. They were not frequently asked for such mild refreshments at the "Chough and Crow;" two ladies ordering tea in the private parlour presented a phenomenon which might never be repeated. And as Sarah and Nora imbibed the scalding-hot, inky fluid, they decided, as soon as their bill was paid, to go back to No. 7, Laburnum Terrace, and ask boldly for the Rev. Mr. Pettifer.

Meanwhile, that misguided gentleman had quietly

entered the little house where Mrs. Bratt now resided, never dreaming that the wife of his bosom had seen him waiting on the doorstep. The redoubtable Betsy had changed her quarters, and gone in for what she supposed to be gentility. She welcomed her brother in her usual style: "There now! if I didn't know as something more than or'nary were a-going to 'appen! Why, only the night afore last I dreamt of sticking pigs, and the more I stuck 'em the more they 'ud holler; they 'udn't die! Says I, our Charlie 'll be turning up, see if he don't! If ever I dreams o' pigs, I'm sure to see some of my own folks."

"I really do not perceive the connection between the animals you name and myself," replied Mr. Pettifer, in his grandest style, which did not at all accord with his questionable costume. "Why did you write to me, when I particularly requested you never to do anything of the kind?"

"Bless you! I didn't write; I can but just make my mark with a pen. I got my lodger to write the letter; he did the pot-hooks and things, and I told him the words."

Mr. Pettifer groaned, as he seated himself in the chimney corner where, in spite of the warmth of the day, a fire was burning.

"Worse and worse!" he said, angrily; "taking a stranger into your confidence, and letting him know our family secrets! Betsy, you'll provoke me into renouncing you *in toto*."

"What do that mean? I don't understand no language but English."

"It means that I will have done with you, Betsy. You'll get no more money out of me if you do not keep to conditions. You promised me that you would attempt no intercourse with me; that you would neither come to Arleston, nor write to me. You know you promised."

"Well, and what if I did? I never could keep promises when they wasn't to my own advantage. And I made you a promise all in the dark, my lad; and I'll make no more till I sees my way a step or two further than I does now. I've bin to Braffle many a time since I saw you last. Why, I was in the church when you was wed; and I heard then as you'd married an old gal with more brass than anybody could count in a lifetime! And since then I've made

inquiries, and I find, Charley, boy, that you're the very richest cove in all Braffle; leastways your wife is, which comes to the same thing."

"No, it doesn't come to the same thing. My wife is extremely well off; I confess—her father left her a nice little fortune; but it is all tied upon her; and she is as stingy as if she did not know where her next sovereign was to come from. I have had trouble enough, and unpleasantness too, I can tell you, in getting from her the sums I have sent you; and yet you are not satisfied."

"No, I am not!" replied Mrs. Bratt, with emphasis; "and what's more, Charley Pettifer, I'm not a going to be satisfied. Here's you as grand and rich as Creasus—I've heard tell of him, though I don't know nought about him—and me as poor as a rat, and of no account to anybody."

"You *can't* be poor, unless you are very wasteful. Why, you have had over £400 from me since my marriage; what have you done with it? You cannot spend it, living as you do!"

"Can't I? that's all you know about it! Well, first of all, when I got the three hundred, that you thought was to keep me quiet for ever and a day, I made up my mind to move out of Denver Lane. It had got past bearing, that neighbourhood; the perlice was always a prying about, and there was always some scrimmage, and somebody a-hooting out for the bobbies. And, thinks I, 'It isn't no ways proper for me to live in such a hole, and my brother a hordained minister of the Church of England, as I've heard you say many a time; and now I'm sister-law to such a fine lady I don't ought to keep in this place, which is most ungenteel.' So I made up my mind I'd leave Denver Lane, give up business, and retire into private life."

"But you haven't given up business; this is a shop, isn't it?"

"Well, yes; it is and it isn't. You see I was lonesome without my shop. I'd got nothing to do; I tried keeping a wench, but, lors! she drove me that mad with her idle, imperent ways, that I drove her out o' the house one day, when my blood was up, with a stick. And I just give her one whack—and she deserved it!—and she got a summons out again me, and I had to go before a magistrate,

and pay ever such a fine, and *costs*, and swear to keep the peace, for I don't know how long, to Margaret Scatcherd. I'll Scatcherd her when the right time comes, or my name ain't Betsy Bratt! Howsomdever, I couldn't do without business, as I'd been used to, over the counter, or in a barrer, ever since I wor big enough to cry pennywinkles in Bristol streets. I was that dismal that I lost flesh, and was that off my feed that I couldn't touch a bit of meat unless it was relishy—such as duck or goose, with plenty of stuffing, or sassengers, or a bit of pickled salmon. So I got some goods, and bought a second-hand counter cheap, and put things in the winder; and though I don't get a living by it—not likely in this sort o' neighbourwood—I have something to occupy me when I ain't busy about the house. If I'd book larning it 'ud be different; but I can't read nor write, though I can add up figures; and I never took to religion, else I had thought of joining the Primitives. They're right hearty people, and it makes me feel quite pious like when they shout 'Amen,' and 'Hallelujah;' but I'm told they're awful strict, and don't allow many things as I should never go for to give up; so I keeps clear of 'em. And that's all the history of how I come to live in this here mighty genteel Laburnum Terrace. I thought as you'd be glad I had got things more genteeler about me."

"I should very much have preferred your remaining in Dènver Lane. I could go there without fear of being recognised; there are several people on this road whom I know. You ought not to have come here without my consent."

"Botheration and nonsense! I'll go and take a shop at the Pentangle at Arleston, if I like, and I'll let it out to every man and woman and child as I'm your own sister. I'm not ashamed of you, if you are of me! I'll own you anywheres, my lad; and I mean that you shall own me. You don't ought to be that proud and stuck-up that you must deny your own flesh and blood."

"What is it you want, Betsy?"

And the unfortunate Charley looked quite sick and pale; he was too much of a bully not to be a coward, and he knew that Mrs. Bratt was quite capable of paying Sarah and Nora a morning visit at "The Woodlands" if

once she decided to do so. He could *bribe* her! He had at that moment a pocket-book crammed with notes —good, clean, crisp notes of the Bank of England. Yes; but he had bribed her already to the tune of three hundred pounds, and she had not kept faith with him; nor were her promises, on her own showing, at all to be relied upon. He had read of *lettres-de-cachet*,—how he wished he could, with a few strokes of his pen, consign his troublesome kinswoman to exile or perpetual imprisonment! But he was an Englishman, not a Venetian; and, above all, he lived in the nineteenth century, in which telegrams are more in fashion than *lettres-de-cachet!* So he could only ask, with an air of resignation, "What is it you want, Betsy?"

"I'll tell you, my lad," replied Betsy, with alacrity. "Come, now, that's something like. But, first of all, let's have a bite and a sup, for I never can make a good bargain on an empty stomach. I've got some prime corned beef and pickles in the cupboard; and there is a barrel of XX. in the cellar that runs as fine as wine; and I've a bottle of the best whisky you ever tasted. I can't take it neat myself, it's that strong; and I'm no temperance body, and that you knows!"

Mr. Pettifer did know it, and so did all Mrs. Bratt's intimate friends. Some connection with temperance societies would doubtless have been good for her. Not that she was often intoxicated; but she drank steadily, and could take more than most people without being what is called "the worse for it." She had a great contempt for tea, and small beer, and for all mild beverages, which she stigmatised as "cat-lap."

Charley was quite ready for a "snack," and he watched Betsy put the kettle on, and bring out the beef and pickles, and the loaf-sugar, and the tobacco, with a certain satisfaction, all unconscious of the woful tea-drinking at Dringfield, not three miles away. If he thought of his wife at all, he imagined her and Nora sitting down to dinner at "The Woodlands," using silver forks, and damask napkins, and cut crystal, and waited upon with all due solemnity by the Evangelical Eastlake. He did not quite like dining without a tablecloth, and he had long ago got out of conceit with steel forks, willow-

pattern plates, not over clean, and a paucity of knives. And to a gentleman accustomed to grouse cooked in divers ways, to *pâté-de-foie-gras*, to all the delicacies of the season, corned beef from a cheap eating-house, very red, and very flabby and moist, and very fat, with stale mustard, and suspicious-looking and worse-tasting pickles, is not exactly tempting fare. Nor is a man who rejoices in the bouquet of champagnes, moselles, hocks, and burgundies continually, likely to care much for fiery, peat-flavoured whisky.

Mrs. Bratt ate her beef, and thought it excellent; and she drank, as a prelude to the spirits, some of her fine XX.—how much Charles could not say, for, on his refusal to "do some heavy wet," she applied her own lips incontinently to the jug.

"Don't you like your beef, now?" asked Betsy, when, about to cut herself another slice, she observed that her brother's plate was scarcely touched.

"No, I don't," he answered, with an air of disgust, laying down his two-pronged fork; "it's not half boiled."

"Got the gravy in it, that's all! I can't abear *my* meat over-done; it don't do one no good. Ah, I see, you've ate all sorts of kickshaws and Frenchified stews till you've no stomach for wholesome food. I mind when you was thankful to get a bit of butcher's meat, and you did not care much about the cooking. My! what a world of ups and downs it is! Have some bread and cheese; I've got a piece of Cheddar fit to set before Her Majesty."

On the assurance that the cheese was qualified to appear on the royal table, Mr. Pettifer consented to take some, in lieu of the flabby, half-boiled beef. He mixed himself a tumbler full of grog; and though the first mouthful was not to his liking, the next was better, and the next better still; and before he had finished his tumbler he began to feel a certain, though qualified, respect for his sister's whisky.

"It's all I can get," he said to himself, as he waxed amiable; "I may as well make the best of it. It's potent, if it does taste all of peat."

"Have you not a lemon, Betsy? I think it would

improve this whisky," he continued aloud, as he proceeded to mix himself a second dose.

Mrs. Bratt fetched a lemon, and while the reverend gentleman delicately peeled the fruit with his penknife, he began—"And now, Betsy, my dear, let us come to a thorough understanding. Don't let you and I fall out, whatever we do."

A little alcohol went a long way with Mr. Pettifer, for he had a weak brain; and strong drinks up to a certain point made him singularly amiable and confiding; a little more, and he became absurdly maudlin.

"I'm sure I'm quite willing to be friends," replied Betsy, feeling herself much soothed; "it's the very thing I wants, that we should be friends. It's against all common sense, and against proper feeling, and against Christianity that you and me, as had but one father and mother atween us, should be brother and sister unbeknownst to the world. So, as you says, *let's be friends!* I'll be most 'appy to make your wife's acquaintance, though I can't say I think much of her; she looks as if she'd bin brought up on bitters and sours. I say, tell us, now, ain't she got a temper?"

"A temper! I sometimes think she is possessed with the devil, she's that nasty and contrary, and cranky. But, Betsy, what you ask can't be; it wouldn't do, my lass; indeed it wouldn't. Just ask yourself, now, whether you are fit to move in aristocratic circles?"

"Aristocratic circles!—that means high life, don't it? Well, p'raps I ain't as genteel as I might have been if I'd only got eddication, as you have. It's eddication does it all, I make no doubt; but there! I am as I is, and if I knowed better I daresay I should improve. I'm not above improving myself, as some simpletons are; and I'd soon learn quality ways, trust me. And I'd like to know that pretty gal! Oh, my! Charley, she *is* pretty, and no mistake; I could have gone down upon my bare knees to her as she stood behind that old maid, your wife—in such a lovely dress, too! I wish she'd had the brass, instead of the old 'un."

"I wish it too; I wish it profoundly!" sighed Mr. Pettifer, with a sentimental air—he was fast reaching the pathetic stage. "But the ways of Providence are inscrutable."

"Providence 'elps them as 'elps theirselves, I've heard. But most likely it's all for the best. The gal, such a beauty as she is, sets a high price on herself, I should say, and right she is, too; and she'd never 'ave give herself to such as you. The other was thankful to get any sort of 'usban', I've no doubt; but the young 'un, as looks for all the world like a picter, may 'ave her pick."

Charley winced; he knew that he might as well have presumed to espouse one of the princesses as Nora Lane, who even yet, though perfectly respectful, and even submissive, kept him at such arms'-length that he did not dare to take the slightest liberty. But he replied, with a smirk, "Of course the sweet girl is now my niece, and that makes all the difference; otherwise, I flatter myself, I should not have wooed in vain. I always make an impression on the ladies, even when, out of pure kindness to them, I rendered myself as unattractive as possible. Some men have a way with women, and some haven't, you see; and if ladies will fall in love——"

Mr. Pettifer was talking rather incoherently, and, from boasting of his success as a lover, he turned to the vexed subject of the supplies, and Sarah's vixenish temper and parsimonious habits. He gave his wife an extremely bad character, and hinted that he would quickly resort to stronger measures than she had any idea of. Then he lapsed into an exposition of High Church principles, which was about as edifying to his companion as if he had expounded the creed of Buddha. Mrs. Bratt was "no Church," and took little interest in ecclesiastical differences and squabbles. She began to get extremely tired of the Rev. Charles's long screed of doctrine, which, as she truly said, "went in at one ear and out at the other;" and the afternoon was passing away, and nothing was settled. So, being a woman of decision and of vigorous determination, she at once applied herself to the onset. "Come, now, drop that, please!" she exclaimed in the middle of one of his most rhetorical flourishes, "I don't care a rap what you call yerself. Be a Papish, if you like; them as gets you on their list don't get much in the way of learning nor piety, as we know atween ourselves. Only mind what you're about, for England won't never stand too much on it. It don't forget Gunpowder Plot, you see;

and, while you're agoing in for the Pope o' Rome, and his ways, you may get took up short, with your Church all a-tumbling about your ears. But that's neither here nor there. Just hand over the cash you've brought me."

"How do you know I've brought you any cash? Have I so much reason to be pleased with you that I should bring you a present?"

"Just hand it over, that I may see if it's all right and count it afore it grows dark; my eyes is not what they did use to be."

And Mrs. Bratt folded Charley in "a meek embrace," and, before he had time to stand upon the defence, thrust her hand into his breast-pocket, and drew out the precious pocket-book, filled that morning with bank notes to the value of £500.

"Thank you," said she, with a sardonic smile, which bespoke her a veritable daughter of the house of Pettifer. "I'm much obleeged to yer, I'm sure. Now I won't trouble you till next time."

And, lifting up the skirt of her rather dirty dress, and disclosing a still dirtier stuff petticoat, she dropped her prize into some inner and most private pocket.

But Charley was not so easily to be defrauded. He had placed the notes in separate hundreds, and he intended to yield as much as might seem imperative, certainly no more. As to relinquishing the whole five hundred, he never thought of such a thing, and Betsy's clever *coup d'état* struck him for the instant dumb with astonishment.

"Come! that won't do!" he cried, looking dangerous. "That's just highway robbery, and if you don't give me back my property at once, I'll just give you in charge."

"Oh, no, my dear lad, you *won't—you know you won't!* Think how awk'ard it 'ud sound—'a hordained clergyman of the Church of England, or of Rome'—be dashed if I know which it is *now*—'agiving of his own sister in charge to the perlice!' And it wouldn't be no good, for I should say as you give it me for 'olding of my tongue, while you purtended to be a gentleman. Oh, my! what a flare-up there'd be! I just wish you'd give me in charge now, it 'ud be such fun—and I do like fun."

"Nonsense; give me my property, I say!"

"I won't; it's mine now. If there's any private papers

in the pocket-book I'll return 'em by post; I can't read 'em."

Charles was getting furious; his passion, aided by two stiff glasses of whisky grog, was fast getting the mastery over his prudence.

"Give it me!" he shrieked, "*you* ——"

Here, I am sorry to say, the angry man used a little—well, let us call it *unclerical* language. He made use of an ugly epithet, not fit for ears polite, but most familiar in those early days when "his childhood fleeted by." Probably Sarah, in all her life, had never even heard the coarse expression.

Words, however, seemed unavailing, for Betsy only laughed, and muttered something about her flannel petticoat.

Charles immediately rushed to the natural conclusion that in this necessary feminine garment was the hidden pocket, in which the sequestered five hundred pounds was retained. He grappled with her at once, but she was a match for him, and defended the treasure gallantly. For several minutes the tussle went on, Charles's grey coat and his sister's dress coming to grief in the encounter. Suddenly Betsy uttered a shrill, loud scream, followed by another, and another, each one more piercing and discordant than the last.

Help was nearer than Mr. Pettifer supposed, for he never imagined but that they two were alone in the house together. As the last shriek died away, Mrs. Bratt resumed her organs of speech, and called, or rather shouted "Carridge! Carridge! here, I say! Make haste—I'm being killed!"

Instantly heavy feet shuffled overhead; then heavy feet came tramping down the stairway; the door slowly opened, and the tall, gaunt figure of a powerful-looking man appeared. "What's up?" he asked, thrusting Charles away as he spoke. He did not seem to put out his strength at all; nevertheless, at his touch, the reverend gentleman went spinning to the other side of the room, like an exhausted teetotum.

"What's the row?" persisted the new-comer, who was big enough, and brawny enough, and certainly evil looking enough, to strike terror into the soul of a braver man

than Charles Pettifer. "If it's a mill you want, I'm your man!" continued Betsy's champion, rolling up his sleeves and displaying a pair of horny fists, one of which could have sent the unlucky Pettifer right into the middle of next week. Mr. Pettifer was aghast. Was he to be murdered as well as robbed? Was this a den of thieves? He was instantly quite sober, and a little faint, and he was going to make some kind of appeal to his formidable sister, when, glancing through the open door, which commanded the window of the front room, he beheld a sight that paralysed every nerve, and rooted him to the spot, where he stood and stared, dumb, cold, and pallid with astonishment and fear. Betsy Bratt and Co. stared too. They concluded he was "*struck*."

CHAPTER XLV.

DEEPER AND DEEPER STILL.

WHY did the Rev. Charles turn pale, and look like one distraught? You who know how near were Mrs. Pettifer and Nora will at once understand the situation, which to Mr. Pettifer himself seemed utterly incomprehensible. For there was a fly drawn up before the gate, and there, giving directions to the driver, was his wife, whom at first he took for a spectre, or rather for a spectral illusion, produced by an over-excited and disordered brain.

Ah! it was no spectre; it was Mrs. Pettifer in the flesh, and she was taking silver out of her purse in most unghost-like fashion. Also Nora stood beside her, and the next minute the two were advancing up the narrow path of the little front garden.

Mrs. Bratt at once took in the dilemma and its possible consequences, and she resolved to side with her own—for

this time at least. She had the £500 safe beneath her own skirts, and she could afford to be generous. Besides, she could, whenever she pleased, go over to the enemy, and change her tactics; conscientious scruples never troubled Betsy, and she really believed that her rich brother was her lawful prey, and that she might, and *ought* to "spoil him," as the Israelites of old spoiled the Egyptians. Only Betsy was not at all "up" in Bible history; she knew as much about the Pharaohs as about the Ptolomies, and had no idea whether the Israelites or the Egyptians were drowned in the Red Sea.

"Did you ever, now?" she exclaimed, as she beheld Mrs. Pettifer and Miss Lane nearing her own threshold. "Fly, Charley! fly! Go out by the back door; run down the garden; jump over the wall—it's lowest by the pig-stye; and cut across the field into the lane. You may get home while I keep 'em talking. Trust me! 'Mum's' the word, my lad; and I won't desert ye; not yet, leastways. Here's yer hat, now; I'm sorry I tored your coat—be off with you!"

Then she told the man she called Carridge to sit down in the inner room, and listen to all that was said, and come in and back her at the proper time. She gave Charley a minute to get down the garden, and then she unlocked the front door. Not being in a very pushing way of business, she generally turned the key when she took her ease in the back parlour. She threw on a shawl to hide some dilapidations in her dress, which had suffered in the conflict. She hastily smoothed her hair, and put on a meek, stupid face, and went to serve her assumed customers. "What is it you please to want, ladies?" she said, in her politest style, and with her most imperturbable expression, while she folded her hands in the clean, white apron she had just tied on.

Sarah felt rather taken aback, and for the moment knew not how to proceed. Charles never *could* have any sort of intrigue with this woman—so old, so fat, so coarse, so ugly, and smelling so horribly of spirits! There must be some one else in the background; perhaps the dreadful creature had a smart daughter!

"I am Mrs. Pettifer," said Sarah, at length, trying to speak calmly and with dignity; for Nora had schooled

her how to behave all the way from Dringfield. "Whatever you do, *ma tante*," she had said, "control yourself; keep tranquil; speak not hotly, but with composure. And, I beseech you, gesticulate not with your hands."

Thus tutored, and feeling that Nora was her staunch ally, and altogether reliable, she opened the campaign with all prudence and decorum.

"Yes, mum," replied Betsy, as if waiting to know who Mrs. Pettifer might be, and looking as unconscious as if she had never heard the name before.

"And I wish to speak to my husband," pursued Sarah. "Will you kindly tell him I am here?"

"Where is he to be found, mum?" And Betsy put on a puzzled look.

"Here, in this house! I saw him enter about an hour and a half ago. Yes, I *saw* him come in," reiterated Sarah, who was getting both alarmed and angry at the woman's stolid manner.

"Well," said Betsy, with a condescending smile tha might have revealed the truth had the ladies had the smallest inkling of facts—it was such a perfect Pettifer smile, half a sneer, and half a self-complacent chuckle—"there's many a one comes in and goes out again in the day; and I couldn't say but your gentleman may have been in since morning. It's bin a busy day rather—quite a run on Noah's Harks and brandy-snaps. I 'aven't a Hark left, mum, if you'll believe it! What's your gentleman like?"

Sarah paused a moment, and then replied, very slowly, "Rather above the middle height; neither thin nor stout; a pale face, dark straight hair, and large hands. He wears a loose grey suit, a slouched wide-awake hat, and smoked spectacles; also, he carries in his hand a black dispatch-bag, quite new and shining, with a knot of purple ribbon on the handle. And I saw him," continued Sarah, raising her voice a little, but speaking with great deliberation, "standing at your door there at four o'clock, or perhaps a little earlier."

"Why didn't you speak to him, then?" asked Mrs. Bratt, sharply.

"I—I was going somewhere else," replied Sarah, feeling rather nonplussed.

But Nora put in her word—"Our errand is to see him

now. We shall be much obliged if you let him know we wait for him, and that our carriage is at the door."

"But, my dear young lady, how *can* I let him know you are here, when I don't—as I'm a living woman—know where he is! A grey suit and smoked glasses, d'ye say, mum? Is your gentleman a *bagman?*" (Which term is still extensively used to designate a commercial traveller.) "Because," went on Mrs. Bratt, "just afore the clock went the hour the bagman did look in; but he didn't stay no time, for I wanted nothing but gutta-percha frogs that allers sells winter and summer. I'm sorry I didn't think to ask him where he was a-going next. I should say as he'd hark back to Wolverham; he's a Breffle man."

"No. Mr. Pettifer is not a—— bagman, if you mean a commercial traveller; he is not in business at all, and has nothing to do with gutta-percha frogs. Try to remember whether you have not seen such a person as I described."

"Well; it do seem like the bagman, just! it's him to a *tee!* He'd grey clothes on, rather shabby uns, and smoked spectacles, and he carried a bag in coorse; and, now you mentions it, I think there was sommat purple-coloured on the 'andle. I'll ask my lodger; he saw the bagman, and they chaffed together. I say, *Tom!*"

Instantly the feet renewed their shuffle; the door between the two rooms, which had been well ajar, was pushed open, and the gentleman named Carridge came in, combing his hair with his splay fingers, and blinking, as if just awakened from balmy slumbers. "Well, missus!" he stammered, "d'ye want I?"

"I want you to tell these ladies what the bagman, as I ordered the toy-frogs from, wor like. This yer lady 's bin and lost her 'usban', and she thinks she sor him come in at our door this afternoon; and I feels sure as no one but the bagman did come in all the afternoon—except the children, with their nusses, as bought my last Harks."

"The bagman!" responded Mr. Carridge, slowly, and scratching his head as if he were trying to rouse himself up. "What wor he like? Why! he wor like a wagabone Methodist parson, and he wor dressed in a hold grey suit, coat and veskit, and pants, all the same, and he wears coloured glasses, he do; and I do forget, missus, whether he'd on a billy-cock or a straw hat."

"Does you recolleck whether or no there was anythink remarkable about his bag 'andle?"

"Well! I think there was—some rigmarole o' this colour!" and he pointed to Sarah's violet silk dress.

"There! you see, it *is* the bagman as you want!" said Mrs. Bratt, triumphantly. "I know'd as it was! If you'll call again to-morrow I'll get his proper directions from the public he uses when he's in these parts."

"It is not the bagman I want!" exclaimed Sarah, passionately; "it is my husband, Mr. Pettifer, I'm seeking; and oh, you wicked woman, you know he is in this house at this very moment!"

"Well, I never!" retorted Betsy. "And who be you as calls *me* a wicked 'oman, I should like to know? *I* ain't nabbed your precious 'usban'; perhaps the perlice 'as. A pretty lady you are, a-coming into my shop, and taking away my cha*rac*ter with yer foul dispersions! But you are welcome to go all hover the house, from the attics to the coal-cellar, to look for yer 'usban', if you like! I don't wonder he runs away from you—I don't! Look at the young lady—she's hill!"

Nora was leaning on the counter, very pale, and trembling all over. Mr. Carridge was regarding her as attentively as if he wished to take her portrait from memory. Mrs. Bratt ran to fetch a glass of water; but Nora, clutching at her aunt's arm, whispered, "I want air—air. Come away! don't stop here another minute, or we shall be murdered!—I know that man."

"Don't faint!" cried Sarah, piteously, as she supported Nora to the door. If Nora became really insensible, and she were left alone with these evil-minded persons, one of them a murderer—for so she interpreted Nora's words—who could say what might befal? But the air revived Nora, who was not at all a fainting person; and when Mrs. Bratt appeared, with the glass of water in one hand, and a bottle of spirits in the other, she was ready to walk to the fly, which was still standing at the gate.

"Drive to the station," said Sarah; and they commenced their homeward journey.

"Now, Nora, what is it? And who is this dreadful man?" asked Mrs. Pettifer, when they were once more in motion.

"*Ma tante*, it is horrible; it is like a dreadful dream. That man is the *mauvais sujet*—the accomplice of the wicked cook who betrayed us to the robbers. I knew him again directly he came in, but I could not at first recollect where I had seen him. Then it flashed upon me how I saw him talking to the cook on the afternoon of that day; and also I remembered what I could not that afternoon—for I assured Fanny that his face was not strange to me—I remembered, in the same instant, that I had seen and spoken with him before, in Ashford churchyard. He knew who I was, and asked me if my name was not Leonora Lane."

"How very strange! So few people know that your name is Leonora."

"And he assured me that he would be 'my friend,' and he spoke very coarsely and rudely. I was much frightened. He did not beg, but he looked like a very bad man—a real *mauvais sujet*, and I ran away as hard as I could till I got near the houses and the open road."

"You never told me this before?"

"Well, no; I never did! Perhaps I ought to have told you; but when I came home you did not seem inclined to talk about anything but the chintz covers, which you were so vexed were spoiled. I thought it did not matter, because nothing really happened; only I resolved that I would never stop so late in Ashford churchyard again. The first thing he said to me was, 'Be you old Lane's grand-daughter?'"

"How extraordinary! Had you ever seen him before?"

"Never, I am certain; for his face is so peculiar that, having once seen it, I could never forget it. I have never been in Ashford churchyard since. All that evening, before the thieves came, I kept saying to Fanny, 'Where have I seen that man before?' She tried to make me believe that I fancied it, but I knew it was no fancy. Then your coming home put it out of my head; but when he stared at me, with his hair all rumpled and his eyes half shut, I knew in a moment that he was cook's accomplice, and that he was the same who frightened me three years ago in the churchyard."

"That a man should frighten a girl out late and alone is nothing remarkable, I am sorry to say; but that he should address you by name is quite unaccountable."

"Yes; and I recollect now, that when, having admitted that my name was Leonora Lane, I asked him what that mattered to him, he said very earnestly, and not disrespectfully, and yet as if he meant something, 'It do matter; but never you heed.'"

"Strange, most strange! And that woman is a queer creature; I don't like her at all. I felt as if she were telling me a pack of lies. What *can* Charles have to do with such people? And what are we to do next?—we have gained nothing by our visit."

"We must go home as fast as we can; it is getting quite dark."

"And when we get home?"

"*Ma tante*, I would counsel you, since you honour me by asking my advice, to be quite open with Mr. Pettifer. Let him know that you did see him—that you penetrated his disguise; and I think you have every right to demand from him a full and frank explanation of what seems so very questionable."

"I shall certainly demand from him an explanation; but oh, Nora! how can I be sure that he tells me the truth? Once or twice lately I have thought that he distorted facts, and now I feel less confidence in him than ever. Where did he get those clothes, I wonder? Do you think Eastlake knows anything about them?"

"No, I don't think he does; I think no one knows save Mr. Pettifer himself. He would never put himself in the power of a servant."

When they reached the station they found their train just gone, and there would not be another for three-quarters of an hour.

"We must go into the waiting-room, I suppose," said Sarah, wearily. "Oh, what a day it has been!"

"It has, indeed; are you not very tired, *ma tante?*"

"Fearfully tired, and yet too excited to sit still. Nora, I shall not know a moment's peace, and I shall get no sleep, till I have penetrated the mystery. Where will he spend to-night?"

"Surely not in that house! It could offer no accommodation to a gentleman, and Mr. Pettifer is, you know, so particular as to be fastidious. And yet, perhaps, he puts off his regular habits and requirements with his regular

dress. *Ma tante*, might not a grand scandal be made of this, did any other person recognise him in his disguise?"

"It might, indeed! If it came to the Bishop's ears, there would be an investigation. I have heard of a man stripped of his gown for no greater indiscretion."

"Still, a man could not be punished for merely masquerading. This is a free country!"

"No; they could not punish him for wearing any sort of dress, I suppose; but they would know *why* he assumed it. A respectable man does not disguise himself, and appear in a character which is not his own; and that reminds me—perhaps he really figures as a bagman among these people, and perhaps they only know him as the traveller who calls for orders; though what his motive could be for such a deception I cannot guess. That he is engaged in some low, vile, abominable intrigue, I am convinced."

And Nora was convinced of it, too. Looking at his conduct in the most charitable light, nothing, as it seemed, could satisfactorily account for Mr. Pettifer's strange behaviour. Respectable married men did not go about in disreputable attire, unknown to their wives, and remain out all night, no one knew where. Not only would a Christian man reject such a course of conduct, but the merest worldling who cared about his good name would refuse to be so compromised. Nora never called Mr. Pettifer *mon oncle* again, and Mrs. Pettifer never asked her why.

Wearied and worn, at length they found themselves once more in their own Bradfield station. They took the first cab that came up, and drove home to "The Woodlands." How peaceful it looked as they entered the dining-room, where a pleasant fire was burning! for, though the days were warm almost to sultriness, the evenings were damp and cold. The cheerful blaze lighted up the large, handsome room, and was reflected in the tall, mahogany bookcases in the stately sideboard, with its imposing background of plate-glass; in the classic bronze figures upholding lamps; and in the harmonium, Nora's last birthday present; and it shone on the rich Axminster carpet, and on the crimson curtains, with their rich silken folds. All around were the signs of opulence, everywhere was comfort and luxury; for Mr. Pettifer had never rested till the house was what he called "thoroughly

refurnished." Such a home might have been an earthly Paradise; but at that moment, looking about her at all that was costly, and elegant, and luxurious, Sarah wondered whether she might not have been happier at Salamanca House, despite its dreary chambers, with an income of seven or eight hundred pounds, such as she had expected to inherit on her father's death. She was intensely thankful, though, that she had Nora to be as a daughter to her; there was so much quiet strength and plain good sense in the girl. In all the small crises which had hitherto occurred she had always known what was the best thing to do. But this was a crisis of a different nature—the like of it had never happened before; and Nora was doubtful how far she ought to interfere where the difficulty lay between married people.

Sarah rang the bell for her maid. "Fidgin," she said, "I am too tired to go upstairs; take my walking things and Miss Lane's, and tell Eastlake to make us some tea."

But Nora sprang up. "Please, I had rather go upstairs. I am not so tired now, and I must get a good wash. I feel smoke-dried and dusty, and Wolverham smoke is worse than Bradfield smoke. My very gloves smell of it. Fidgin, I should like some warm water; but you need not take my bonnet."

"I am dusty, too," said Sarah, dolefully, "but I have not the least energy left. When I go upstairs, it will be for the night." And she lay back in her easy chair, feeling utterly crushed and hopeless, when Nora and Fidgin disappeared. What did it matter if she were dirty and untidy? What if she sat with unwashed hands and face and blowsed hair? It mattered nothing, and nothing mattered! At that moment Sarah felt—just as people do feel at such times—that life was over for her, and that she could never be anything but miserable any more. Eastlake came in with the urn, and he glided noiselessly about while he made the tea, and brought in the bread-and-butter and toast, and things more substantial. The table, as usual, was faultlessly spread. Eastlake was a capital servant, and knew his work, and took pains with it. Sarah glanced wearily at the pure white damask, the burnished silver, the delicate, fresh-tinted china, the cut-crystal jars of golden honey and ruby-coloured preserves,

and the beautiful flowers so skilfully arranged by Eastlake, who was an adept in all kinds of floral decoration. What was it all worth? Nothing could give her pleasure any more! It was the climax of her misery that she still loved this man, who had thus wronged and outraged her; that she could not rise up proudly and coldly, like the Sarah Lane of old, and thrust him from her affections. "God comfort me!" she groaned to herself. "I cannot help loving him, wicked as he is! And he is my baby's father. And I cannot—no, I cannot—yet put him away from me, however guilty he may be! Oh, Charles, cruel Charles, I did love you so truly! It was such a pleasure to me to buy all these things that you liked, and to make the house perfect for you—yes, for *you!* I should never have done all this for myself and Nora!"

All at once Sarah noticed that there were three tea-cups set on the tray, and that the table was laid for three persons. "Ah!" was her inward comment, "Eastlake forgets his master is not at home. Oh! where is he?"

Nora was a good while upstairs, for she could not rest till she had made quite a toilet, in order to get rid of the unsavoury Wolverham smoke and dust. Then feeling quite refreshed, she ran to the top of the house to the nursery, that she might know how little Minnie fared; and the young lady happening to be wide awake, crowing and laughing with good temper, Nora lingered to take her in her arms and talk to her, and to listen to some request which nurse had to make about a bath, and so the time sped, till all at once Nora wondered that she had not been summoned to the dining-room.

Sarah was still making her solitary moan, and bewailing her hard lot; all the harder, because her wifely instincts told her that the heaviest part of her burden must be borne by herself alone, unshared by Nora, when she heard steps, not Nora's, coming leisurely downstairs. "Had it been possible," she thought, "I should say that was Charles, shuffling down in his old slippers."

The next moment the door was opened, the muffled footsteps were on the threshold, and there was Charles himself, arrayed in the most irreproachable clerical costume. In a long, glossy black coat, spotless neckband, high silken waistcoat, with hair neatly arranged, the latest

Guardian rustling in his hand, he stood the very *beau-ideal* of a pronounced High Church clergyman—that is to say, so far as raiment and demeanour were concerned.

Mr. Pettifer came calmly towards the fireplace, and gravely accosted his wife.

"I heard you were back, my dear. You did not tell me you intended spending the day from home. You seem tired!"

Sarah answered not a word, but she looked him full in the face, scornfully and defiantly, with fast-locked lips.

"Are you too tired," he continued, "to render yourself presentable? Because, if you are not, you might put on a collar, and get Fidgin to brush your hair; your face, too, is unmistakably *dirty*. I do not like a dirty wife!" And Mr. Pettifer assumed an air of mild jocularity, and would have kissed Mrs. Pettifer's hand, the face being too begrimed for a salute. But Sarah thrust him away.

"How dare you!" she cried passionately, almost savagely; with a look in her eyes he had never seen before.

"How dare I touch my own wife? My love, you are more theatrical than ever! I am afraid you read exciting, sensational novels, which are the poison of our light literature. If I had my way, Miss Braddon——"

"Never mind Miss Braddon," interrupted Sarah, fiercely. "Do you know this is not the first time we have met since we parted at the breakfast-table?"

"Do I know what? I do wish, Sarah, you would behave rationally, and remember that you are the wife of an Anglican clergyman of repute. You have a character to sustain."

"I can take care of my own character; and you, who have none to sustain, need not concern yourself about mine."

"Are you mad, Mrs. Pettifer?"

"I wish I were! I would try to think it were so, only Nora could scarcely be mad too. We *both* saw you."

"You both saw me?—when, and where? If you choose to go to Prior's Spa, you would very likely see me. But as I never dreamed of your being there, I did not happen to see you. Is that a very great crime?"

"I have not been near Prior's Spa to-day, nor have you.

I saw you—here is Nora, she saw you too, and recognised the bag you carried by the purple ribbon she herself tied on. Am I not speaking truth, Nora? Tell Mr. Pettifer all about it."

Nora accordingly told the whole story of the day's adventures, omitting only the visit to Mr. Salisbury's office; and Mr. Pettifer listened calmly, and with apparent amusement, every now and then exclaiming, "Well, now, that is strange! Quite exciting, I declare; what next?"

"So this is the top and tail of it," said Mr. Pettifer, laughing, when he had heard everything there was to hear, including the conversation with Mrs. Bratt. "Nora, I thought you had more sense. Your aunt always was half-crazed, I believe; but you ought not to be so carried away. You go to Wolverham—no reason why you should not go, if you wish it; you see there a certain shabby, loose-looking individual, in seedy-grey clothes, an old wide-awake, and smoked spectacles; and because there is some chance likeness between us, and because you saw a bag like mine—a funny coincidence, I grant, the purple ribbon—you accuse me of going about the country as a bagman—for, on your own showing, it *was* the bagman, or town traveller, Sarah, whom you so kindly identified as your own husband. And when did you ever see me in a dirty-grey suit, and a wide-awake?"

"Never, till to-day. Where have you put your disguise, and where did you procure it?"

"Sarah, you will put me into a passion, if you go on with this stupid farce much longer. Take my solemn word for it—I am not, never was, and never passed anywhere as a '*bagman!*' I don't even know a bagman's duties, for I have always, as became my cloth, eschewed commercial rooms. Besides, I have been at Prior's Spa since, before noon; about four o'clock I found, to my infinite satisfaction, that the private church business, which was to take me to Conventsworth, had already been arranged. Consequently, I was free to return home; and return I did, as the servants would have told you, had you asked them—rather more than an hour before yourself. I was surprised to find you both out, certainly; but I am not so cruelly and wickedly suspicious as to accuse people of improper

conduct, simply because they have chosen to practise a little reticence, even towards myself."

"I suppose the first thing you did was to change your bagman's suit?"

"I think, if you ask Rhoda, who let me in, she will tell you that I was in my ordinary out-door costume. Eastlake will tell you the same, for he immediately attended me to my dressing-room, and going up stairs I met nurse, and asked how the baby was, and if she were asleep. They must have perceived it, had I been in 'disguise,' as you call it. I certainly changed my dress, but that I do every evening. I think it worth while to make a proper appearance in the bosom of my family. Are you convinced?"

"No, I am not. I cannot doubt the evidence of my own senses. You say you were at Prior's Spa, and I saw you in the Great Moor Road at Wolverham, scarcely two miles, I should think, from Dringfield."

"A nice place for two ladies to visit—the haunt of colliers, and puddlers, and all sorts of low characters. I think it is I who have to call you to account for indiscretion. Well, if you are not convinced, I cannot help it."

"Where is that bag?"

"It is upstairs. Eastlake will bring it down, if you wish; it is just as he packed it this morning. Shall I ring?"

"No, that would prove nothing."

"The bag would not prove that I was at Wolverham, certainly."

"Only that we saw it there, and in your hand. You had no gloves on."

"Did you see it, Nora?"

"*Mais oui*, I did see it, Mr. Pettifer; and I saw you, as clearly as I see you standing there; only your dress puzzled me, and the spectacles made you look so very different!"

"Ah, ah, ah! very fine indeed! I looked so very different, and yet you knew me at a glance! Most conclusive reasoning! Ah! ah! ah!"

"But you carried the bag—the *bag*, I say! I am positive I saw the identical knot of purple ribbon which, at your

request, I fastened securely on the handle. You said purple was the proper ecclesiastical colour, only my shade was not right, not blue enough."

"Of course I did. But might not another man get a knot of ribbon put on his bag, you silly, illogical child? If the traveller had set up a new bag, why should not he take precautions to identify it? When you went to Southbourne did you not tie a piece of scarlet braid on each of your packages, that you might the better recognise them? That was what gave me the idea of marking my bag in some way, so that I might know it and claim it at a glance. These gentlemen's travelling bags are far more alike than are ladies' travelling-trunks and bonnet-cases."

"A bagman would scarcely select an 'ecclesiastical colour,'" replied Nora, coldly. "It would be most inconsistent. Also, Mr. Pettifer, the knot I made is a peculiar one, and little known in England. English fingers never tied the knot I saw to-day at the door of No. 7, Laburnum Terrace."

"Have you spent your £500?" asked Sarah—I am sorry to say, with a sneer.

"That is a question I refuse to answer. I have been catechised enough. Nora, pour me out some tea, and give your aunt some; perhaps it will put her into a better temper." But Mr. Pettifer turned pale to the lips at the mention of the £500. And both his wife and Nora observed his sudden change of countenance.

Mrs. Pettifer refused to sit down to table, but she took a cup of tea sitting by the fire. As soon as the meal was over, Sarah retired for the night. As she went to the nursery, she called Fidgin, and said, "I am so overtired, and so unwell, that I think I should prefer to sleep alone. Do you and Rhoda make ready the small spare room. I know the bed is well aired."

Nora was so dreadfully tired that she fell asleep almost as soon as her head felt the pillow. She awoke, as she imagined, in the middle of the night, and her aunt stood by her bed. "Wake, Nora," she said: "be quiet; get up, and go with me."

Nora was not quite sure whether she did not dream; she sat up and rubbed her eyes, for her slumbers had been of the soundest. But it was already morning, and the

grey September dawn was stealing through the blinds. "What is it, *ma tante;* are you ill?"

"No; not ill enough to need attention; but I want you to get up and dress, and go with me to St. Mildred's."

"There is no service there yet; it is hours too early. The church will be locked up." Then Nora saw that her aunt held in her hand a bunch of keys, one key larger than the rest.

"We are not going into the church; we are going to Mr. Pettifer's 'private rooms,' as he calls them. Something tells me I shall find the grey suit there, smoked spectacles and all! At any rate, I am going to look. If I leave it till he goes there again, he will destroy those things, or send them away out of my reach. Now is my opportunity; but I cannot go by myself. It is past five o'clock; but we may be back before the house is astir. Put on your old waterproof and a thick veil; we shall meet no one but milk-boys and policemen. You will come with me, Nora? I shall go mad, if this suspense continue another day. I have not slept. I thought of this just as the clock struck one, and I waited impatiently till the day broke. See, it gets lighter every moment!"

Nora hesitated an instant; then she said, "*Ma tante,* I will go with you. I think, under the circumstances, you have a right to satisfy yourself."

"And if we do *not* find the grey suit, or any trace of it, I shall begin to think we *may* have been deceived! And oh, Nora, what a blessing that would be! I would give all I have to be sure he really was at Prior's Spa yesterday, and that man we saw at Wolverham really was the bagman, or anybody else in whom we are quite uninterested."

CHAPTER XLVI.

WHAT THEY FOUND IN THE DEN.

St. Mildred's stands in a broad and open thoroughfare —that is to say, the church itself does; but the school-rooms are in a back street, and Mr. Pettifer's "private rooms"—they no longer exist—were in fact a small four-roomed house in a court immediately behind the church, with which it communicated. Sarah never spoke all the way from her own home, and she walked so fast that Nora was almost out of breath keeping up with her. In about a quarter of an hour they found themselves in Lark Court, in a corner of which, secluded from all the other houses, was the mysterious tenement they came to visit. Both ladies had been there before, once and once only, introduced with great formality by Mr. Pettifer himself. As they stood before the door, Sarah threw up her veil and turned to Nora:—"If we find these things, this horrible disguise, it will be the death of me!"

"Let us hope for the best," replied Nora, not knowing what to reply. The more she thought about it, the more probable it seemed that the bagman's suit would be just where they were going to look for it. It would be so easy to keep any sort of contraband possessions in this out-of-the-way nook, the keys of which Mr. Pettifer always took charge of,—Nora did not know how her aunt obtained possession of them; and there would be no difficulty, and little danger of being observed, if proper precautions were taken, in making any change of clothes under shelter of the "Den." Mr. Pettifer could enter the little house, lock the door behind him, throw off his regulation costume, assume his disguise, and get off, not by the way he came, but through the church, or by the back door of his den, into a blind alley which opened into a labyrinth of

wretched streets, and afforded the shortest route from St. Mildred's to the railway station in Old Street.

It was full daylight now, a beautiful September morning, and the fleecy, rosy clouds still lingered above the spire and pinnacles of the church. A fresh breeze was blowing from the south, and the population of the low neighbourhood in which they were was only just beginning to be astir; they seemed to have the place entirely to themselves as they stood together in the uttermost corner of Lark Court, scarcely daring to cross the threshold of the house. The key turned at last, and they entered, and stood at once in the outer room on the ground floor. It looked eminently ecclesiastical. Formerly the walls had been decorated with plain texts. An "Invitation to Sinners," framed in black wood, and various sheets of verses of Scripture and of hymns hanging on rollers, such as we see at nearly every railway station—this had been the aspect of the room when the ladies saw it last. Now, the texts were gaily illuminated; the "Invitation to Sinners" had disappeared, as well as the Scripture portions on the rollers, and instead of them were short addresses on "Holy Baptism," a metal *crucifix*, "Rules for Churchmen" in an Oxford frame, a "Hymn of Praise" in which "the Mother-Maid" seemed to be the person chiefly lauded, and a small oaken bookcase, filled with little books of Popish tendencies. The Bible still lay on the table, in company with a large prayer-book, red-lettered, and a gorgeous hymnal just issued from the press.

There was nothing in that room to excite suspicion. The cupboards (there was one on each side of the fireplace, intended for common household purposes) contained nothing more important than the discarded literature of the walls and of the bookshelves—heaps of dusty tracts, which had been recently, or within the last few months, "called in" as "unorthodox;" heaps of the Evangelical hymn-books formerly in use, a supply of common writing-paper, a few pens, and a large bottle full of ink. The room was simply and indeed austerely furnished; no carpet on the floor, only a square piece of matting under Mr. Pettifer's uncushioned arm-chair; the table was of common deal, covered with something that

had once been green baize; the chairs were of the hardest and most uncompromising sort; and round the white-washed walls were narrow benches of a penitential aspect. For this was the room in which the incumbent of St. Mildred's gave audience to such of his sheep and lambs as desired a private interview; and here, in the old time, when the *Record* sometimes lay upon the table, special prayer-meetings on week nights were occasionally held.

"There's nothing to find fault with in this room," said Mrs. Pettifer, when she had rapidly surveyed it; "only the floor might have been cleaner; and the window-blind is a disgrace. But I dare say the Puseyites, like their exemplars, the Papists, think a little dirt promotes sanctity. As for that *rubbish*"—pointing to the crucifix and the illuminated "addresses"—"I should like to burn it all!"

They passed on to the inner room, the door of which was locked; and here Sarah held up her hands, and exclaimed loudly. For once Nora, who, Frenchwoman as she was, disliked gesticulation intensely, felt quite inclined to pardon the irrepressible excitement. The little homely parlour had been converted into a richly-furnished and most luxurious sanctum. Exquisite cabinet pictures on Church subjects adorned the walls; the carpet was of the richest and the softest; a leopard's skin served as hearth-rug; velvet-pile easy chairs and couch invited to repose; fleecy rugs were spread wherever feet might be supposed to tarry; crimson silk curtains shaded the window, which was filled with stained glass; a small carved oaken bookcase was furnished with handsomely-bound volumes; an ecclesiastical-looking timepiece, and some valuable ceramic ware, ornamented the mantel-shelf; many pretty and costly little trifles were strewn about—all testifying to the good taste and luxurious habits of the reverend occupant. Below the bookcase was a piece of furniture which combined the uses of a *secretaire* and a chiffoniere or buffet, for the room was small, and it was necessary to economise space. Sarah again produced her keys, and, after some trouble, found one which fitted the *secretaire*, or deep drawer, the front of which fell back to form a writing-desk.

It was full of letters, papers, and memoranda; but

Sarah was far too excited to examine them just then. She was, as you have seen, a woman of definite and persistent purposes, and, having come hither to hunt for the bagman's suit, she was determined to search till she found it, or till she was satisfied that it was not on the premises. She was pushing back the drawer, which went awkwardly because she did not understand the slide, when her eye caught a photograph, folded in half a sheet of very dirty paper. Probably she had shaken the picture free from its loose envelope, for she had not noticed it as she ran hastily over the contents of the *secretaire*. She would have been more than human, and less than woman, had she not looked at it! I think her first idea was, that it was a portrait of poor Ruth, who once upon a time had her likeness taken.

This parlour—I believe Mr. Pettifer spoke of it as his "oratory"—looked away from the rising sun; its stained glass window gave upon a tiny yard, shut in by high walls. Even at noonday it must have been rather dismal; but now, at this early hour—for the clocks were only striking six—it was a *very* "dim religious light" that illumined the recess where Sarah stood. She carried the photo to the window, for she could perceive that it was the representation of a woman, and much too large and fat for her predecessor. As the coloured light fell upon it, she gave a shriek, and cried—"Oh, Nora! it is she! it is *she!*"

Nora looked, and sure enough it was "she!" the redoubtable "she" who was giving them all this trouble and annoyance—Betsy Bratt herself, in all the glory of best clothes, and a countenance beaming with obnoxious self-complacency. She was taken with a landscape background, a style to which persons of her class are extremely partial; and the artist or the sun had succeeded in producing a very faithful, though far from flattering, portrait of the lady. One glance was sufficient. Nora recognised it as quickly as if she had been on terms of intimacy with the original. Aunt and niece looked at each other, half in consternation, half in incredulous surprise.

"There! that is proof enough!" said Sarah, passionately, looking down vindictively on the fat, coarse, cunning face. "We have him now! a man does not keep

the likeness of a woman locked up and hidden away without sufficient reason. Besides, he declared—you heard him—that he knew no person at all answering to my description, and that he never in his life entered any house on the Great Moor Road, save that of Mr. Hallibutt, and that of Mr. Jackson, whom we know! Nora, I will be divorced from him! I will bring my wrongs before the public. It is my duty to expose such wickedness. I will be his wife no longer!"

"*Mais, oui!* but, *ma tante*," replied Nora, with her colour rising, "I really cannot believe that it is as you think. A man may be acquainted with a woman, and even have her portrait, and yet there may be no—what the French call *liaison!*"

"There is everything that should not be, I am convinced! He is a bad, wicked, faithless, treacherous man! Don't try to excuse him, Nora, or I shall lose my temper."

"But, *ma tante*, it is not in reason that he should care for a woman like that. And she is worse than her portrait, for that does not speak. I never in my life heard any one converse so vulgarly. She is evidently a person in the lowest rank of life. There is not a poor woman in my district half so horrible as she is. And, then, she consorts with thieves! that dreadful man is her friend—perhaps her relative. No, *ma tante*; that there is some mystery which ought not to exist, I cannot doubt; but that Mr. Pettifer cares for that coarse, bold, ugly old woman, I never will believe! She can be nothing to him!"

"She must be something to him; or why does he visit her secretly, and why does he treasure up her likeness? And why does he tell *lies*, and pretend not to know her? Faugh!"

Nora was silent, but unconvinced. Her common sense told her that it could not be as her aunt suspected. Girl as she was, and inexperienced in the naughty world's ways, she had a great insight of character, and she had not lived two years under the same roof with Mr. Pettifer and failed to discover his peculiarities. She knew that he was vulgarly conceited, intolerably vain, disgustingly pretentious, small in soul, and narrow in mind. Also, she knew his

love for grandeur and profusion; his delight in what he termed "style;" his hankering after popularity and personal distinction; and, above all, she had found out, what neither Ruth nor Sarah had discovered, his weakness—by no means criminal weakness, be it understood—for pretty girls! If Mr. Pettifer ever went astray in the direction implied by his wife, youth and beauty would be the temptation: age, ugliness, low breeding, and grossness would be so many repellants to a man of his sensuous, yet not precisely sensual, tendencies. He was about as likely to be in love with Mrs. Bratt, as his wife with the *mauvais sujet!*

"What is that?" said Sarah, pointing to a paper which lay at her feet in the shadow of the rich curtain-folds. Nora picked it up. It was the half-sheet in which the photograph had been wrapped; and on it was some villanous-looking writing, clearly the production of a most illiterate person unaccustomed to calligraphy. They had great difficulty in deciphering the composition, which read as follows:—"denver lane wolveram Dr charles I 'ave 'ad my pottygraft took and missis mudge and mister carridge they doo say has its as good has Never was so I thowt i'd best Send it yow to remind yow of Mee which it doo Seem you 'ave a-most forgottin Dr charles I 'ope as yow'll Like the pottygraff which it wur took as the bible say in the twinklin of a Hye and me in my noo rise straw Bonnit with Red ribbings and pink roses in it and my grene Dress all over ferills and wollonces has the Fashun his and a 'ooman yow know may has Well bee owt off the Wurld has howt off the Fashun Dr charles I 'ope as this finds yow in 'elth has it Leves Me at Presence ony oping as yow'll cum sune too wolveram and bring plentee off the Nedefull for i'm a runin short I can tell yow and the ole Gal may has well fork howt the Browns i'm a goin' to flit into the grate more rode hupper hend denver lane is a gittin that ongenteal I can't stand It no longer and when i thinks wot qualerty yow is and wot i har to yow i feels has hits ony my dooty and my dooty i allers did and allers will doo so no moor hat presence from yowers to Command helizorbeth brat."

"A charming effusion, truly!" said Sarah, when, after excessive pains and difficulty, they had succeeded in

making out this delightful *billet-doux*. "What can it mean? Of course, I am the 'old gal' alluded to, and 'forking out the browns' is slang for signing cheques, I should think. And, you see, Nora, the impudent hag refers to *what she is to him*, and gives that as a reason for moving into more respectable quarters at his expense—or mine, rather! I have always heard of Denver Lane as being one of the worst haunts in Wolverham. And she is short of 'the needful,' is she? I wonder what she calls '*short*.' And I should like to know when this precious epistle was written; it is not dated."

"*Ma tante*, does it not strike you that Mrs. Bratt is a little like Mr. Pettifer? Yesterday I thought there was something in her face that seemed familiar."

Sarah examined the "pottygraff" once more, while Nora pointed out the resemblance, or what she fancied to be such. The likeness lay chiefly in the eyes, and in that tell-tale feature, the mouth; otherwise, the two faces were entirely different—Mrs. Bratt's being twice as large as Mr. Pettifer's; and his nose being straight, thin, and insignificant, while hers was crooked, knobby, and of extraordinary proportions. It was rather an undefinable something in the expression, than any special *trait*, that gave one the idea of similarity. Sarah took off the locket-brooch with which her shawl was fastened, and compared the two. "Yes," she said, after a lingering scrutiny; "there *is* a likeness, Nora!—a very faint one, yet it is there unmistakably!"

"Could she be his mother, *ma tante?*"

"Oh, no! she is not old enough. Charles is about forty-two, and this woman is not much above fifty-five, I should say; besides, his mother died years ago—in Ireland, I think; at any rate, I am sure that she is dead." The fact being that Mrs. Pettifer *mère* had died, as Charles truly said, "years ago," though not, as he inferred, in Ireland, but in the Wolverham workhouse.

"Also," said Nora, "this is not the sort of letter a mother would write to a son. It is no more a mother's letter than a love-letter! Can it be that Elizabeth Bratt is Mr. Pettifer's married sister?"

"Oh, no!" replied Sarah once more, quite confidently, forgetting her lord and master's mendacious propensities;

"she cannot be, for he has no sister living. His only relative is a brother, whom he confesses is a sort of what you would call *mauvais sujet*—the black sheep of the family, in short. He is somewhere out in the colonies!"

And at the public expense! Sarah might have added, had she only known the truth. Mr. John Pettifer was a convict, who had forfeited his ticket of leave. And Charles had several uncles and aunts and an indefinite number of cousins scattered up and down the country, only he acknowledged none of them. Mrs. Bratt was the only one of his own kin with whom he had any dealings; and, as you must have perceived, she was not a person to be easily ignored.

"Then she must be his cousin," persisted Nora; "for that there is some relationship between them I feel certain. I tell you, *ma tante*, this woman has power over him, but not the sort of power which you suppose. That Mr. Pettifer tells grand untruths I am well aware; but I think not that he wrongs you so dreadfully."

"Thank you, Nora, for your comfort," said Sarah, grasping her niece's hand. "I little thought when first you came to me what a comfort you would be. I will try to believe that my husband is not guilty of—— of what I never could forgive; but, still, I *must* know all about this Mrs. Bratt, and what is the nature of Charles's connection with her; for that he has relations with her he can no longer deny."

And Sarah took up a large envelope that lay on the table, and put into it the photograph and the letter; and then she disposed of it very much as her sister-in-law had disposed of the £500; for Mrs. Pettifer, as well as Mrs. Bratt, patronised secret pockets; then she locked up the *secretaire*, and unlocked the cupboard below, where she found only a nice little supply of wines, half a raised-pie of some sort, a decanter full of finest Cognac, sugar, lemons, some glasses, tumblers, and other conveniences for the enjoyment of choice refreshment. She smiled grimly as she contemplated her husband's stores; whatever he lacked, he certainly understood the art of making himself comfortable. There was still a little cupboard to be explored—a poor little cupboard, in a recess, such as you are pretty sure to find in every inferior sitting-room in

Bradfield. But Mr. Pettifer, instead of removing it, had turned it to account as a side-table, and had caused the front to be highly ornamented. It was not even fastened, and was found to contain only heaps of railway and other cheap novels—Miss Braddon's proscribed "poison" among the rest. "He thinks what is hurtful to the goose may nourish the gander, I suppose!" said Sarah, with another of her grim smiles. Remembering Mr. Pettifer's fierce and wholesale denunciations of Miss Braddon and all her guild, Nora felt just a little contemptuous. "I did wonder," she said, "how he knew all about those 'pernicious books' so well; but I fancied he had read the reviews. *Ma tante*, the bagman's clothes are *not* here, after all!"

"They must be here, Nora! We have not been upstairs, there are two rooms above." Accordingly they ascended to the upper story, and first they entered the front chamber, which seemed to be a sort of lumber-room, quite unfurnished, save for a lot of dilapidated trunks and boxes, and a mangy portmanteau full of old clothes, in the last stage of tattered shabbiness. One might have fancied that the Rev. Charles Pettifer occasionally did a little private business in Rag Fair, and dealt in "old clo'," and cast-off wardrobes, and waste paper; for various ancient garments lay about the floor, as well as a quantity of superannuated tracts and missionary registers, and torn pamphlets of a serious character. This room remained in its primitive dinginess, and everything in it was thickly coated with dust. The spiders and the mice seemed to have it to themselves. But that of which they were in search was nowhere to be seen.

Only the back room remained, and this was locked up, as the luxurious little parlour downstairs had been. This chamber was furnished, and replete with every comfortable and elegant appliance. All toilet requisites were there; a large swing glass, costly scents, a dressing-case, and many other bedroom luxuries. Was the reverend gentleman anticipating his better half, and preparing a separate establishment of his own? But Sarah saw not the crystal bottles, nor the scent-boxes, nor the ivory-backed brushes, nor anything at all, save the grey-stained jacket and trousers, and a checked shirt, a gaudy necktie, and a disreputable

wide-awake lying on the Marseilles counterpane—flung there evidently by some one in hot haste. The smoked glasses were on the mantelpiece, and a pair of dusty ill-made high-lows were on the hearth, as if hurriedly kicked off, and left there. Sarah buried her face in the counterpane and wept bitterly: she had-hoped against hope that she might not find the things she sought. Now! there could be no mistake. Whatever might be the issues of this discovery, Charles had proved himself a bare-faced liar, a cheat, a low-intriguer, and there must be something at the bottom of all this, most disgraceful, most repugnant. Poor Sarah! though she had despised many of the refinements of life, till they were forced upon her; though nature had not intended her for a gentlewoman, she had always worshipped at the shrine of respectability. "I shall never hold up my head again," she sobbed to Nora, who wept with her for very pity, and vainly strove to comfort her: "I am the wife of—I know not what! My husband is all that is base, all that is unprincipled; perhaps, all that is criminal! How can I credit his simplest assertions? how can I trust him in the smallest matter? Oh! I am a wretched woman, a very miserable woman! I could wish I had died when my baby was born. My poor little baby, to be the child of such a villain! And God visits the sins of the fathers upon the children—the Bible says so; so she will be punished for her father's wickedness!"

"Hush, *ma tante!* you must not say that! It does not mean *that!* Don't you see that you slander the dear God? You make Him, who is infinite love, to be no better than a bad, fierce, revengeful man! If you wronged me, do you think I would visit the wrong on poor, innocent little Minnie? Ah, you know I would not! And you think such hard things of our Father in heaven."

Sarah made no reply. She wept on, till Nora began to be afraid she would be too exhausted to leave the house. Alas, poor woman! her cherished convictions failed her in the day of her trouble. She could not call upon the God whom she ignorantly worshipped—the stern, implacable Deity of her comfortless creed. She felt the foundations of her childhood's faith slipping away from under her feet; she was on the quicksands, her soul was in darkness,

and the winds and waves of mortal anguish gathered round her.

"What shall I do?" she cried to Nora, as to one who could help her.

"Call upon the Lord, *ma cherie!* This is the day of trouble. He has promised to deliver you, and you shall glorify Him."

"I can't! I can't! I don't know the Lord! I never did know Him!"

"Just lay hold on Him, then. Give yourself into His hands. He will bring light out of darkness. His word is pledged, and He will do it. This is an awful trial, but our God will help you; don't be afraid of Him, your only Almighty Friend."

"He is punishing me for my iniquities. He is angry with me."

"We all want punishing sometimes, because we are just like foolish, perverse children. But punishment, or *correction* rather, means love. The dear God wants to draw you to Himself. Ah! *ma tante*, be consoled! There are good days yet in store for you; God will bless you, I know He will."

Sarah rose up at last, quieter, but with despair at her heart. She trembled, and sobbed still with agitation, and her features were swollen with the tears she had shed. "We must go home," said Nora. "It will soon be breakfast time, and we shall be missed. It would not be well that *he* should find us here."

"Oh, no! no, indeed!" responded Sarah, a new terror coming upon her. She felt that she might go mad if she had to face her husband at that minute. "But what shall we do with these things?"

"We must leave them; we cannot well carry them away?"

"He will deny that we saw them; he will say they were not the same, that we rushed to conclusions."

"He can scarcely, I think, be so audacious; but let us take the scarf and the spectacles; put them in your pocket. I will take the hat under my cloak."

"What will he say when he misses them?"

"He must not miss them. You must show them to him, photograph and all, before he comes here again.

Ma tante, no half measures will do; you *must* get the truth from him. Now let us go. Never mind about locking the door. I will tie this veil—it is thick, luckily—so as to be double over your face; and I think we had better not depart through Lark Court, where all the people will be about now, and wonder, if they recognise us, which they cannot fail to do. We can go through the church, and there are cars close at hand; you are not fit to walk home."

Sarah gave herself up to Nora's guidance without further parley. Exhausted, terrified, stung to the quick, she could only lean tremblingly on her niece as they passed into the church. She gave one glance at the pulpit and shuddered; how well she remembered that fateful night when she had listened to the sermon on the star "Wormwood." Nora, too, thought of Ruth's peaceful dismissal from earth, and she said to herself, "Ah! sweet soul, she was taken from the evil to come."

It was past eight when they got home, and were admitted by the astonished Eastlake. Rhoda was the only person who had discovered their absence. She was first down that morning, and she had found the front door on the latch. She was too wise to speak to any one of this; she knew that something was wrong between her master and her mistress; she could only hope that the other servants did not suspect it. She meant to watch for her ladies, and let them in herself; but at the moment Nora rang the bell she was out of the way, and Eastlake coming from the morning room close at hand.

"I must go to bed; I am very ill," said Sarah, when they got upstairs. "Don't let anybody come near me. Bring me some tea yourself, and then I will lock the door; and I shall open it to you only."

Sarah, indeed, looked so ill that Nora was afraid to leave her alone, and she had no small difficulty in getting her undressed and into bed. She resolved that she would not breakfast with Mr. Pettifer; she *could not*, after all that had transpired. The idea of a meal *tête-à-tête* with him was intolerable, and made her gasp as from a sense of suffocation. She ordered tea for two, and desired Eastlake to tell his master that the ladies were unwell, and breakfasted upstairs. You may be sure Eastlake was too

well-trained a servant to make the least rejoinder; his countenance was inscrutable as he received Nora's commands; and he simply answered, "Certainly, ma'am; where shall I carry the tray?"

"On to the landing. Leave it on the marble stand. I shall hear you."

And Eastlake, with face unmoved, and in his softest, most unmeaning tones, delivered Miss Lane's message to his master. But as he carried the tray, which Rhoda furnished, to the place appointed, he muttered to himself, "Well! this is a rum go! Something's up! I wonder what it is? It's not my place to inquire, that's one comfort."

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE "ANGLICAN" CURATE.

It was to be a day of adventures for Nora. Mrs. Pettifer became so unwell towards the afternoon that her niece began to be alarmed, and wished to send for Mr. Corrie, who was still their medical attendant.

But Sarah would not hear of it. "No, no!" she protested, when Nora urged; "it is useless; he could do nothing for me; it is not medicine I want; oh, no! My head will be better to-morrow; put some wet cloths on it, and I will try to go to sleep. Oh, if I could only *forget!* I should like to sleep for days."

And Nora applied the wet cloths, and wished she could go to sleep herself, for her head ached also, and she was very tired. Moreover, she was getting anxious lest Mr. Pettifer should go to his den, and make inevitable discoveries, before he had had any communication with his wife. Nora lingered upstairs all the morning, avoiding the

proximity of the study, and listening excitedly to the sounds of movement below. Mr. Pettifer went as usual to the daily morning service, and when he came back about noon, he brought with him his latest accession in the shape of a curate—a pretty, fair-haired, white-handed young man, who was half-crazy about Gregorians and processions. Not being over-burdened with brains, the glitter, and variety, and frippery of the bastard Romanism which the Ritualists affect, pleased his small soul greatly. He was wild, too, on the subject of vestments, and he came to luncheon that morning to talk over some changes which he and Mr. Bonser, the senior curate, were anxious to effect in the ecclesiastical millinery of St. Mildred's. Also—to let out his little secret—he was in love with Nora! and, what with embroidered robes, carrying out the rubric, practising chants and hymn-tunes with the choristers, who could not be induced to modulate their voices or to keep time, studying mediæval lore and monkish legends with Mr. Bonser, and Miss Lane's *beaux yeux*—he had very little rest of body or peace of mind. The young ladies of St. Mildred's all worshipped him, for the Rev. Cyril de Grey was of good family; he was nobly descended, and he had an ample private income of his own. There were plenty of young ladies at St. Mildred's *now*, you must observe! Arleston being in its way a wealthy and fashionable suburb, boasted of many girls who had nothing particular to do, and, therefore, took to Ritualism like ducks to water. They delighted in the new *régime*, they stood up and reverently bowed their heads in Mr. Pettifer's sacred presence; they adored him as being invested with supernatural powers and prerogatives, and they rendered to the curates that *cultus* which is peculiar to foolish, empty-headed young ladies of the faith Episcopal.

But to none of these syrens did Cyril de Grey incline. Nora's lustrous beauty had ravished his soul from the very first, and the hapless youth, in spite of "higher aspirations," and dreams of the "Anglican cloister"—whatever that may be—was fathoms deep ere he knew what he was about. At first he was shocked at himself, for he had decided that "women were a snare," and he had all but vowed himself to celibacy—not quite, however, and he gave his young passion the full benefit of the incomplete-

ness of his sacrifice. The more he saw of Miss Lane, the more he yearned to make her Mrs. de Grey. And why should he not? He had always pleased young women. He had a sweet pink and-white complexion, and the most delicate hands, with taper fingers and almond-shaped nails. And he could chant, and intone, and sing sacred melodies, from oratorios down to "Twinkle, twinkle, little star." In short, he was as interesting, and pretty, and amiable a young "*priest*"—for he was just in full orders—as the most fastidious maiden could desire. And he was well connected, and could afford to marry, and his family, who disapproved of his monkish tendencies, would receive Nora with open arms. Why should he not ask Mr. Pettifer to be allowed to visit at "The Woodlands," for the express purpose of paying his addresses to Miss Lane?

Thus, it happened that Mr. Pettifer, who was still in blissful ignorance of the transfer of the "pottygraff," sent a polite message up to Nora, requesting her to head the luncheon table.

"You had better go!" said Sarah, faintly. "It is not good for you to keep upstairs, and you must meet him before the day is out; and as Mr. de Grey is there, you need not talk, unless you choose."

So Nora went, and presided with so much grace, and looked so charming in spite of her headache and languor, that the miserable Cyril was ready to kneel at her feet, and pour out his soul upon the spot. While she, feeling all the better for her sandwiches and her glass of claret, was thinking, "What a very foolish young man he is! There must be something in High Churchism that tends to idiocy, for none of these curates seem to be in the full possession of their senses." When she entered the room, Mr. Pettifer was making explanations: "You must excuse my wife, Mr. de Grey; she went to Wolverham yesterday, and rather overdid herself, and then she had a bad night, so she is doing a little nursing this morning, and remains in her own room."

The bad night must have been a lucky guess, for Charles had certainly not seen Sarah since the evening before. He was evidently still unconscious of the raid upon the den, and he had no idea that the ladies had been out of doors at all that day. And Nora wondered ho-

be when he made the terrible discovery. The two clergymen talked "shop" during the repast; and they discussed octaves, novenas, &c., &c., to such an extent, that Eastlake — still Evangelical — contemplated giving notice; and Nora could have fancied herself back again among the professors of Louison's communion. After awhile, luncheon being over, Mr. Pettifer abruptly left the room; politeness kept Nora at her post, for the curate was still nibbling at his crust; but she hoped his reverence was not gone to visit his unfortunate wife, who was certainly in no fit state to receive him. She comforted herself, however, by the reflection that her aunt's door was locked and bolted. And then she wondered when Mr. de Grey would have finished his crumbs, at which he was slowly pecking like a meditative sparrow.

"Can I offer you anything more, Mr. de Grey?" asked Nora, at length, getting weary of the situation.

To her extreme astonishment, the curate arose, and came close to her side in a very excited manner. "Miss Lane," he exclaimed, "it is I who offer *myself!* Accept me, or I shall be the most wretched man on earth!"

"Offer yourself for *what*, Mr. de Grey?" asked Nora, not quite understanding; for he spoke hurriedly, and when he was powerfully agitated he stammered just a little.

"I ask you to be my wife—my adored wife!" he exclaimed, vehemently. "Oh, Miss Lane, you must have seen that since the hour when first we met you have been all the world to me. I am not worthy of you, but all I have I lay at your feet. I lay myself at your feet. Here I kneel till you say, 'Rise, dear Cyril, I am yours.'" And to Nora's extreme consternation, and also to her amusement, the curate sank gracefully upon his knees. Alas! for the unfortunate lover whose devotion *amuses* his mistress.

"Then," replied Nora, quietly, but gravely, "you will have to kneel there for the remainder of your life; for what you wish me to say I shall never say."

"*Never!*—oh, NEVER? Give me, at least, some ray of hope. Pardon me! I have been rash, abrupt, almost indelicate, in my haste; but love may not be fettered and

held in thrall. You do not—cannot reject me absolutely? I have taken you by surprise."

"You have. I thought High Church clergymen never made love. But, get up, Mr. de Grey; behave rationally, and I will talk to you. I will not say another word while you remain in that ridiculous posture."

The curate slowly rose, and bent himself to listen, for he perceived that the lady of his affections was about to speak. His heart beat almost audibly; his face was deadly pale. He was in earnest, this silly young sprig of Ritualism; and, because he was so, Nora rightly felt that he deserved something better than contempt.

"Am I to understand, then, Mr. de Grey, that you ask me to be your wife?" she said.

He could only utter a few rapturous, incoherent words in the affirmative.

"I thank you very much for the honour you have done me, but it cannot be. In the first place, I do not, and cannot love you; and secondly, I should be very sorry if I did, because, as we do not seem to have one idea in common, and as we differ stringently on the most essential points, we should, if united, make each other incessantly unhappy."

"Do we so differ?" he gasped, nervously. "Could we not both yield somewhat? I shall never 'go over,' do not fear that; you—you are a sound Churchwoman, of course? Can we not study our differences together?"

"I can yield nothing; and I am not at all a sound Churchwoman, as you understand the phrase. As for the nonsense, and folly, and baby-play that you are all getting up at St. Mildred's, words cannot express my contempt of it."

"Folly! baby-play! Oh, Miss Lane!"

"Yes, *folly!*—and something worse. If you were not very foolish I should think you were very wicked; but I really believe you know no better."

"Do you, then, mean that if you loved an Anglican clergyman you would not marry him, on account of his principles?"

"I *could not* love one. I could not love a man of such inferior capacity as to find pleasure in robes, and c
and genuflections, and banners, and male millir

tinsel generally. And as for your dogmas, they seem to me just intolerable nonsense! You insult me when you ask me to believe that a piece of bread is my God! And, what is worse, you blaspheme. I could not love a blasphemer."

"But do you know that your Church is tending fast in that direction? You cannot be of the Anglican Church, and reject her teachings. Believe me, the High Church movement is spreading with vast rapidity. It is penetrating all ranks. The National Church and the Church of those whom you call 'Ritualists' are really identical, and that which differs in outward seeming is fast being merged in unity."

"I quite believe you, Mr. de Grey; but the National Church of England is not my Church. I am at heart a Nonconformist. I renounce a Church that perpetrates folly by Act of Parliament. I will not be constrained to utter words with my lips that my heart disavows. That Athanasian Creed—which Athanasius never wrote—I will have none of it! I will not eat common bread from our own baker's, and out of our own kitchen, and call it—or pretend to call it—the body of my Lord Jesus Christ. Do you see that loaf? Well, if I broke off a bit of it, and ate it in true and loving memory of my Lord, it would be just as much consecrated as if I ate it in church. He who takes and eats the bread consecrates it, not he who assumes to bless it."

"That sounds to me *dreadful!*"

"No doubt. And that must convince you that we are as wide apart as it is possible for us to be."

"And yet you join in our services at St. Mildred's—in the Sunday services, at least?"

"I shall join in them no more, Mr. de Grey. I do not think you will see me there again."

"But what will Mr. and Mrs. Pettifer say?"

"To Mr. Pettifer I am not accountable. *Ma tante*, I hope, will not object. She relishes the innovations no more than I do. You see, I have been used to the real thing, and all these shams strike me as so utterly absurd. Why! you don't half know how to do it, any of you! Your imitation Romanism reminds me of children playing at keeping house, and pretending to pay visits: it is very

well done sometimes, as far as it goes, but there is no reality in it; at the very best, it has a stagical effect to those who know what it ought to be."

"Do you mean, then, that you actually prefer the Sister Church?"

"I do, indeed! I never could care for burlesques and pantomimes."

"But you said you were a Nonconformist? I beg your pardon if I misunderstood you."

"You did not. Because I prefer Romanism to Anglicanism, it does not follow that I must therefore embrace Romanism. I dissent from both Churches; and let me tell you, Mr. de Grey, this is what you and your coworkers are doing with all speed,—you are driving people out of your Church, you are forcing them to Dissent, and you are doing your very best to hasten the day of reckoning, which must come. That there is good, pure teaching in your Established Church, I know from experience; but there is less and less of it. As you say, your semi-Romanism *prevails*. And of this I am sure—you will drive out the teachers as well as the taught, if you persist in making your Church Popish in doctrine and in practice. And now, if you please, I will wish you good morning. I am staying too long away from *ma tante*, who is quite an invalid to-day."

And Mr. de Grey, sorely discomfited, was obliged to accept his dismissal. He had anticipated a far different termination to his wooing, for he had received decided encouragement from Mr. Pettifer, who, to do him justice, really thought that Nora would be flattered by the proposals of a man of such excellent family, and, as he had that day discovered, not at all unlikely to succeed to a time-honoured title. That a girl should refuse pedigree, the *prestige* of rank, and a possible coronet, did not enter into his calculations. He was beginning to think that, all things considered, it would be better—that is, more to his interest—that Nora should marry; and such a marriage as it was now in her power to make would reflect honour and glory upon himself. By his own marriage he had secured wealth; by Nora's marriage he would gain a connection with one of the oldest families in the country; and visions of preferment once more dazzled his mental

vision, and he saw himself prebend, canon, dean, bishop, archbishop!—and why nct, in his ripe old age, on the throne of Canterbury and at Lambeth Palace? Why not, indeed? Only that as, Alnaschar-like, he beheld in glowing perspective the spendid edifice of his future fortunes, came the disconsolate curate to pour out the sad story of his woes, and convince him that his airy castle was only in the clouds.

Meanwhile, Nora returned to her aunt, and imparted to her the news of the curate's proposals.

"Oh, I am thankful you refused him!" cried Sarah, hysterically. "They are all Jesuits! Have nothing to do with them, child. Have nothing to do with men; keep them, one and all, at arms'-length. What has marriage done for me? I might have been a happy woman if I had not been weak enough to listen to the voice of the arch-tempter. Oh, that cruel man! Oh, that cruel, *wicked* man! And I thought he was so good, so vitally pious! Oh, how he can deceive! No, Nora, don't marry; you have begun well; go on and refuse them all —all who would beguile you with vows of love and protestations of esteem. Trust them not. Be Nora Lane to your last hour, and be happy!"

By way of turning the subject, Nora informed her aunt that she did not intend to go to St. Mildred's any more. Sarah's reply was, "I do not think I can go myself; I am afraid I should go wild, and perhaps shriek out denunciations, if I saw that deceiver in all his frippery, or heard him preaching doctrines that he cares no more about than the man in the moon. I wonder if he believes in anything except himself! But where will you go, Nora?"

"*Ma tante*, you know I am shortly to visit my friends at St. Oswald's. I wish to take counsel with Dr. Bethell; I would do nothing rashly; but I must tell you that in all probability I shall attach myself to the communion of Carvary."

A few months ago, Mrs. Pettifer would have heard these tidings with incredulous dismay and loud bewailings, mingled with revilings and abuse of those whom her niece preferred to Mother Church. Now she listened in silence, and at last said gravely, "I do not know that I can blame you, or that I ought to seek to dissuade you

from your purpose. My opinions are changed of late. I think every one should obey the dictates of conscience. I can never become a Dissenter myself. I can never desert my beloved Church of England, though, driven from St. Mildred's, I do not know where I shall find rest. But I respect honest, outspoken Nonconformity, and if the Church were disestablished to-morrow I should not be sorry, if only I might keep my precious liturgy. I can never give that up, Nora; but with you, it is quite another thing. You have not been brought up a Churchwoman; your heart is not bound up as mine is in the Book of Common Prayer; perhaps, if I were you, I should make the same choice. Only, my dear, think well before you finally decide, and hear all that the Bethells may have to say. When will you go to them?"

"Not till you can spare me, *ma tante*. When you are quite well again, and when this unhappy affair is settled, I will write to Gertrude."

"Nora! I am going to get up presently, and go downstairs. And so far as the affair can be settled, I shall settle it to-night. It is useless to defer the evil day—troubles are better faced at once; I shall have no more courage to-morrow than I have to-day—perhaps less, and any hour Mr. Pettifer may go to Lark Court, and discover what has happened. Perhaps he has gone there now?"

Nora thought it very probable, for he and Mr. de Grey had departed together, and Mr. Pettifer had left word that dinner might be served half an hour later than usual.

"Then he will not be in till seven o'clock at the earliest, and it is not much past three yet. I am getting calmer, Nora, and my head pains me less; I shall try to have a good sleep, and then, if I can, I will eat and drink, for I shall want all my forces; and then—and *then*—must be the struggle! I must, I will know the truth, if I walk barefoot to Wolverham to discover it. That woman and Charles must be confronted. Now, my dear, go and take your walk, and I should advise you to lie down for half-an-hour; you were disturbed very early this morning, and you have had an agitating day."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

UP AND DOWN THE GARDEN WALKS.

"AND I shall have an agitating evening," said Nora to herself, as she tied on her hat, for a garden promenade. "Oh, what will be the issues of this miserable affair? And what will Mr. Pettifer do, if driven to extremity? And what will he say to me for having sent away that dilettante curate? However, that is my own concern, and I need not trouble myself on that head. I will try to think of something else."

And Nora walked up and down among the autumn flowers, which were in great beauty that year, for no early frost had yet occurred to dim the soft radiance of their lovely hues. And as she walked slowly, plucking now a sprig of mignonette, and now a spray of heliotrope, she thought she heard her name called in a voice she knew and loved. She looked up, and standing at the barrier between the two gardens was Mr. Stanley, and he was saying, "May I come over into your territory? I have something to say to you, Nora."

Of course Nora could not object; and very certain it was that she did not wish to object. Ernest Stanley and she understood each other pretty well; but the decisive words, which would have justified Nora in admitting an attachment, had not yet been spoken. And that the time was fully come to speak them, Mr. Stanley was quite persuaded.

"I looked for you yesterday afternoon," he said, when they had taken one or two turns in silence—silence more satisfactory to Nora than all Mr. de Grey could have uttered, had he talked eloquence and sentiment for years. I have said nothing about the progress of this love affair, because this is not a love story—that is, a story, the chief interest of which is contained in some love plot, on which

the whole *denouement* hinges. Also, there was nothing very remarkable in the history of the attachment, which had slowly, and for long unconsciously, been growing up between these two young people, who were at once separated and thrown together. They had met and parted, and talked and looked, and somehow—Nora says to this day that she cannot tell how it came about—somehow, she found out that Ernest Stanley cared for her, and at the same time she discovered that she cared for him, and would not object in due season to become his wife, spite of all her aunt's warnings against the evil estate of holy matrimony.

"Nora," said the young minister, "don't you think it is quite time we came to an understanding? It is most unsatisfactory—to me at least—this sort of thing."

"What sort of thing?" asked Miss Nora, innocently, seeming to be quite occupied in the arrangement of her flowers; but the flush on her cheek rivalled the hue of the damask roses, and just a little spark of coquetry was veiled by the drooping lids of the deep violet eyes. She knew quite well, naughty girl, "what sort of thing" it was which her lover found so unsatisfactory, and which, to tell truth, she herself was far from regarding with approval.

Instead of directly replying, Mr. Stanley continued—"I want a sanctioned and acknowledged engagement. I want all the world to know that we are to be married."

"But who says we are to be married? We are not engaged that I know of."

"Not formally, I grant; but I thought we quite understood each other. Nora, you do not mean to imply that I have deceived myself?"

Nora saw that she was giving pain, and she was not coquette enough to torment the man she loved, even for the sake of enhancing the bliss which should come after; but she replied gravely, "You never asked me to be engaged to you, Ernest. I could not take it for granted that you really loved me. It was not for me to assume an engagement which did not exist."

"I suppose not—of course not; and yet I thought it was all right between us."

"And is it not right between us?"

"It is, if you will consent to engage yourself to me, now that I do ask you. Nora, will you be my dear wife?"

And Nora answered as simply as if she had been at the altar, "*I will.*"

And then followed a quarter of an hour of perfect happiness, in which Nora forgot all about Betsy Bratt, and the mysteries of Lark Court. Ernest was the first to awake to the realities of life.

"But what if Mr. Pettifer refuse to acknowledge me as your accepted suitor?"

"Mr. Pettifer has no authority whatever over me; he is simply the husband of *ma tante*. *Ma tante* herself will not, I think, refuse her sanction, when she knows that my happiness is involved. It will be a relief to speak openly to her; and when all the world—that is to say, our world—knows that I am engaged, I shall not be pestered with silly people, who ask what I can never give."

"When can I see Mrs. Pettifer?"

"She is not visible to-day. She was still in bed when I left the house. And I am not sure that she can be spoken to at all this evening, she will be much engaged."

"There is only one thing which makes me rather uncomfortable, Nora. I am afraid you will be a great heiress, and I always vowed I never would marry a woman with money."

"A little money would not hurt anybody, and I have no idea that I shall be anything of an heiress. There is little Minnie, now, you know; she makes all the difference. I suppose she will be immensely rich some day, poor child. I dare say *ma tante* will give me something handsome at once, and I know she means to provide for me in her will; but that has nothing to do with the present, or with our immediate prospects. I do not think you need be afraid of my wealth, though I am glad to feel sure I shall have something; there is no reason, I suppose, why the wife should not contribute her share to the general fund. If I were as rich as *ma tante*, I suppose then you would not take me?"

"I should not have the effrontery, nor yet the moral courage, to woo an accredited heiress. I should not like it to be said that I married for money. I think Mr. Pettifer was a very *daring* man."

"A very impudent man," said Nora, quite bitterly; "but do not let us talk about him. You know I dislike him exceedingly; and just now I am more out of charity with him than ever. When *ma tante* acknowledges our engagement, and when everything is quite settled, I will tell you all about it. I am afraid I ought not till then."

"There is no reason why there should be any unnecessary delay. Annie leaves me in November, as you know, and the cottage is very lonely. It is September now; you might come to me before Christmas, Nora."

"I do not think *ma tante* will approve of so much haste; and it must be as she wills. And I feel as if I would not like to be married in the winter; besides, we are not really engaged yet, you know."

"Are we not? That is news to me. We have been, as far as I can ascertain, engaged exactly twenty minutes, Nora."

"Subject to the approval of *ma tante*."

"And is all that has been between us two to be as nothing, if *ma tante* refuse to ratify the engagement?"

"No, Ernest, I will be true to you, come what may. If *ma tante* shall declare it cannot be, I shall tell her that it must be, and that it will be, some day! but that I will not marry till she gives free consent. However, I think not that there will be any so grand difficulty; doubtless, she will be vexed at first, for she wanted me greatly to keep single; but when she has had time to think of it, she will perceive that it is my vocation to marry, and she will yield, and, in the end, be well pleased about it. She is not so unreasonable—*ma tante*, as she once was; and she has been very good to me, and I would not like to vex her. I think she might have been a very delightful woman but for that dreadful old father of hers, who seems to have been a regular ogre. I like him not. I revere him not, because he behaved so badly to my papa; and yet, do you know, Mr. Salisbury says—he let it out one day—that he is sure grandpapa did mean to leave his son some of the property. He was what is called '*close*,' that poor, rich, old man! but for quite a year before his death he used to hint at 'doing something for Tom;' and Mr. Salisbury believes he fully intended making another will, only his life was cut short so shockingly."

"He was very old, was he not?"

"Very! He was more than eighty; even *ma tante* knows not how much more. But Mr. Corrie tells us that he might have lived years longer, he was so strong, but for what happened on that fatal night. And he used to say himself, even after he became very infirm, 'I am sound, sir; sound as a bell. I shall hold on till ninety.' Yet we all think he was nearer ninety than he imagined, for he had lost reckoning years before, and did not truly know his age. And, as he relied on living a good while longer, he naturally put off making the will which was partially to divide the property. And it did not matter, for *mon chér père* never wanted the silver and the gold. Papa died first, and could never have profited by the will that was to have been made."

"But if he had outlived his father even a day his money would have been yours. Ah! Nora, you have only just escaped being an heiress."

"I am glad. I do not care to be much rich. It is nice to have plenty of money. I know what it is to be poor, for we were poor enough in our dear little French home; and it is nice not to be obliged to stint. But so much as *ma tante* has—bah! I would rather be excused! It is just as well as it is, Ernest; *ma tante* will make me very comfortable, and that is all we shall want."

"You are all quite sure that will was never made?"

"Quite sure! It would have been found had it existed. But Mr. Salisbury held the last will, and he would have had the other, and have drawn it up had there been such a thing. Now, I really must go back into the house. I will not ask you to come with me; but I shall see you to-morrow."

"Surely." And then they walked up and down for another half-hour, saying good-bye in true lover fashion; and then they lingered in the summer-house, so that when Nora, flushed, glowing, and full of happiness, ran upstairs, it was nearly six o'clock. Mrs. Pettifer was dressed in one of her richest silks, and Fidgin had arranged her hair very well. She had dined, though sparingly, and a cup of coffee was to be served to her while the downstairs dinner was going on. Clearly she was arming for the conflict.

But Mrs. Pettifer had been taking the air on the landing,

and from the large window, which commanded the garden, had seen Nora and her lover walking up and down, arm-in-arm, in most suspicious fashion. Once she could have imagined—but, of course, *it could not be!* Nora was so very discreet, and the light was fading, and branches of trees were intervening; but it did seem to her, for a moment or two, as if Mr. Stanley's arm was round Nora's waist! "However," said Sarah to herself, "I must speak to her. The young man may think something if she permits so much intimacy, and I cannot have my Nora talked about." And then something seemed to fall from Sarah's eyes, and she remembered Nora's burning blushes several days ago, and her refusal to pledge herself to perpetual maidenhood. Was this Nora's secret? Oh, how blind she had been not to have guessed it before!

For the first few minutes she was bitter and resentful. She had so wanted to keep Nora entirely to herself. Her husband had disappointed her. Her maternal instincts were not strong, and she was not, as some mothers are, wrapped up in her first-born. She did love the little Minnie, but not passionately. After all Nora was more to her than any other being in the world, unless Charles repented, and became another creature. But God Himself was educating poor Sarah. Slowly, very slowly, and with how much pain to herself, but yet surely, *He* was bringing her out of the House of Bondage—the bondage of her false theology, the slavery of her own selfishness and self-seeking.

Softer, kinder thoughts came to her. "And if it be so, why not? Why should the child not live her own life? Why should I—most miserable—blight her young, fair happiness? Oh, my God! what a horribly wicked woman I am! This is my Christianity, that I always think of myself first. Oh! change this hard, selfish, sordid heart, and make it tender and loving, loving to all about me, for how can I love Thee if I love not the beings Thou hast made? And Ernest Stanley is a good man, a noble-minded man; some day he will be a great man, worthy of my sweet Nora. I dare not say to her, 'Trust him not!' for I know in my heart that he may be trusted to the death."

And soon afterwards Nora herself, lovely, fresh, and

beaming, came in, and then Sarah told her what she had seen, and what she had thought, and what she hoped, adding, "Only deal fairly with me, Nora; hide nothing from me; between you and me let there be no concealments."

And Nora replied, "*Ma tante*, I will conceal nothing. I love Ernest Stanley, and I have promised to be his wife; but till he asked me I could say nothing. Months ago I knew in my heart that he loved me. He looked it, he implied it; but as he did not say it plainly I had no right to speak, even to you. I knew it was coming, what he has said to me to-day, and I could bide my time and be at rest. Only I could not let any one, however near and dear, know the secret of my heart. It was his, and his only. And you will give your consent, *ma tante?*"

"I cannot withhold it, Nora. A mother has no right to spoil her daughter's life; what right, then, have I? But I have no wish to hinder your happiness. I will try for once to be just, and generous, and unselfish. Tell Ernest Stanley to come to me to-morrow."

CHAPTER XLIX.

MR. PETTIFER IS "CORNERED."

NORA and Mr. Pettifer dined almost in silence—a silence that was ominous on both sides. The presence of Eastlake was quite a relief; and his "Hock or sherry, ma'am?" "Claret, sir?" broke pleasantly on the oppressive stillness of the repast. Mr. Pettifer presented a lowering countenance, sullen, resentful, and threatening. Nora wore a dignified, slightly offended air; and the reverend gentleman, as he furtively regarded her under cover of his

table napkin, felt slightly uneasy in the prospect of the reprimand he was about—"*as a duty*"—to administer. His displeasure, however, arose simply from his disappointment at his niece-in-law's rejection of her highly eligible suitor. He had been to the "*den*;" but had only entered the lower rooms, and in the dusky twilight had not remarked any traces of the morning's invasion. Also, he was beginning to get furious with his wife, who continued, as he told himself, "to indulge her sinful tempers, and cause a scandal in the house."

Nora, on her part, cared not one jot for Mr. Pettifer's anger; she was so supremely happy, so blissfully content, that she was only afraid she did not feel sufficiently sorry on her aunt's account. That she evinced no trepidation Mr. Pettifer perceived; and she made an excellent dinner, whereas he could not enjoy even his favourite dish of sweetbreads and mushrooms; nor the cutlets *à la macedoine*, which he had ordered himself; nor the excellent *Chateau Margaux*, with which the attentive Eastlake from time to time replenished his glass. Outwardly, he was only sulky; inwardly, he was chafing at Nora's perfect, high-bred composure, and calling her, as became the brother of Betsy Bratt, "saucy minx!" "good-for-nothing young hussey!" with a few other appropriate epithets, simple and emphatic, but by no means elegant.

"Now, then," said Nora to herself, as she took some grapes from the dish before her—Eastlake having placed the dessert on the table in all due form, and retired to the back settlements, and Mr. Pettifer being occupied in clearing his voice, and drinking deep draughts of claret—"now, then, comes the tug of war! Now, hold your own, Leonora Lane, and say nothing which you will afterwards regret."

At last Mr. Pettifer spoke. "Nora, I wonder you are not ashamed to look me in the face!"

"Do you?" she replied, quietly.

"Now, I will thank you not to be impertinent," he continued. "Don't address me in that tone, or I may have to say that to you which you will not like to hear."

"Mr. Pettifer, I think not that you can say *anything* to me that I shall like to hear."

"How dare you! Do you know who I am?"

"Not exactly," returned Nora, raising her calm, lustrous eyes, and looking him full in the face.

He turned pale on the instant, for the reply which he had provoked was painfully suggestive; and he asked himself, "Had Nora found out the truth?" He restrained himself, and answered, "Nora, do not be flippant; and remember that you are speaking to your clergyman—the priest whom God has set over you. And I speak for your good. Tell me that it was only girlish coquetry, and feminine love of power, which induced you to send away that most excellent, and delightful, and inestimable young man, Mr. de Grey."

"It was neither one nor the other. I do not, could not, condescend to such behaviour. I sent away Mr. de Grey because I could not accept his proposals."

"You would not, you mean."

"Would not, if you prefer it. It is of very little consequence which word you use. No; I *would not*, for all the world could offer, take Mr. de Grey for my husband."

"Your reasons?—if a woman can have reasons!"

"They are so many and so various, I scarcely know how to begin. Neither am I sure you have any right to require my explanations."

Mr. Pettifer grew white with rage. An overweening sense of his own importance, of his illimitable authority as an Anglican priest, had lately grown upon him with a rapidity that would have been marvellous, were it not taken into account that the ephemeral is ever quickly produced, and that "ill weeds thrive apace." "Nora!" he said, solemnly, "I have every right; and you do not leave this room until you have both explained and apologised."

"I was about to say," resumed Nora, daintily eating her grapes between the sentences, "only you were so rude as to interrupt me, that though I do not, and will not, acknowledge your affirmed right to question me, I have no objection to speak quite frankly on the subject of my dismissal of that silly little man. As to apologising, that is utter nonsense. I shall do nothing of the kind, and I am sure you will not be so insane as to expect it."

"You know your aunt will be extremely annoyed," persisted Mr. Pettifer. "What will she think of your inexpli-

cable folly in refusing *such* an offer? An A 1 offer, I may say!"

As Nora knew nothing about "Lloyd's" or the Trinity House, this elegant figure of speech was lost upon her. She replied: "*Ma tante* knows; I hide nothing from her; we understand each other now. And she approves; she would have grieved much had I received favourably the proposals of this young priest. For myself, I tell you I esteem him not; and where I esteem not, where I reverence not, I cannot love. You say, why do I esteem him not? *Vraiment!* there is nothing in him to esteem —that is, in himself. I shall speak plainly. I think all this, what you call Anglo-Catholic, and what the newspapers call Ritualism, is simple, silly nonsense. It is too trashy to discuss. All that Mr. de Grey holds most dear, I hold most foolish, most senseless, most unreasonable."

"Unhappy girl!" and Mr. Pettifer spake as one in sorrow, rather than in anger; "you have imbibed sceptical opinions! you are a—*Rationalist!*"

"I hope so, indeed; it would be very sad to be an irrationalist. If I do not serve God with my reason, I might as well be an idiot."

"You believe in natural law?"

"Of course I do! What other law can I believe in?"

"The *Divine Law*, my poor, misguided Nora; the Divine law as revealed by the——" He was going to use the stereotyped phrase of the party he had deserted, and say, "by the Word of God;" but he recovered himself quickly enough to substitute "the Church."

"The Divine law is natural law," replied Nora; "and natural law is Divine. There can be no law without a lawgiver; and that Lawgiver is God. I do not understand natural law; I cannot pretend to explain it; it is beyond my ken. But I know that it exists—that it governs the universe; and I reverence it, as far as I can perceive it, as a glimpse of the thought and mind of God. But we wander from our subject; we were speaking of Mr. de Grey, and I told him that I did not esteem him and could not love him. I add, that I laugh at the harlequin play of Ritualism, and that I would as soon—ah! much sooner—go on the stage as a columbine than become the wife of a High Church clergyman. The columbine might turn

Bible-woman, if she would; the clergywoman must abide where, by her own choice, she has placed herself. I do not like Sunday operas, and Church theatres, and sacramental jugglery, Mr. Pettifer. It is all too foolish, too childish, too displeasing to God. I go no more to St. Mildred's. Judge, then, if I am a fit wife for your curate.'

"Nora! you contemn holy mysteries. Take heed lest you blaspheme!"

"Take heed lest *you* blaspheme, *M. le Pasteur*. You stand up in that pulpit, and you tell the sheep of your pasture that presently you will say some words—rather, you will *mutter* them—for the High Church party love to mutter—very little light and an uncertain sound is what they love—you will, I repeat, mutter some words, and then you will take up a little bit of bread, and it will be turned into the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ! Bah! you know it is all trash! You believe it not in your heart. You do not think that our blessed, glorified Lord turns every Sunday, or every day, into a wafer or a piece of bread."

"It is my turn now to request you to return to your subject. I will not discuss the most sacred themes with a frivolous girl, who sees only with the carnal eyes of sense."

"I beg your pardon; I come now to the all-sufficient reason of my rejection of *M. le Vicaire*. I love another person: I am *fiancée*."

Mr. Pettifer was about to demand full particulars, when the door opened, and in walked, with all the state and majesty she could assume, the wife of his bosom. Mr. Pettifer sprang to his feet, with a curious mingling of fear and wrath reflected on his sallow face.

Why are cunning people so generally sallow? It must be that scheming and biliousness go together—that intrigue naturally produces dyspepsia! Though, of course, a very sincere person may be bilious; and one may be a martyr to dyspepsia, and yet be frank and open as the noon-day.

"My dear Sarah!" he exclaimed—he had made up his mind to play the amiable sufferer—"how glad I am to see you! And so thoroughly recovered, too! Really,

Nora and Rhoda guarded your door like a pair of she-dragons, and Fidgin followed suit. To think of excluding even your own husband! Ha! ha! ha! They went a little beyond orders, I suppose!"

"No; they obeyed my orders literally. I made no exceptions; I received *no one* this morning."

"Quite French fashion! Ha! ha! ha! That's Miss Nora's teaching!"

"I know nothing of French fashions. It seems to me English enough to shut oneself up when one is shocked, and horrified, and sick at heart; especially to shut oneself up from the person who causes you to be shocked, and horrified, and miserable."

"Ah! you refer to that foolish little episode of last evening. I shall have to advertise for the commercial traveller who haunts the Great Moor Road. Now, my love, be reasonable, and trust your own Charles. You know you always were given to absurd suspicions; you always did rush to conclusions, and ——"

"Hush, I pray you; I beseech you tell me no more—*lies!* I confess, last night, I doubted the evidence of my senses; I tried to persuade myself that Nora and I were alike mistaken, and that the purple ribbon was an accident—one of those strange coincidences that do, from time to time, occur. But now I know—*I have proof!* Hush! let me finish before you reply. You told me distinctly that you were not at Wolverham yesterday; also, you declared that you knew no such person as the woman you described; that you never in your life entered any house in Laburnam Terrace! Hush! one moment more—I have my proofs; and these are they!"

And before the dazed eyes of the luckless Charles, Sarah held the "pottygraff," and the dreadful scrawl which had accompanied it. "You would scarcely be in possession of the likeness of a person of this class, unless you knew her, and intimately; and if there could be a doubt, the letter sweeps it away. I have read every word of your charming 'Elizabeth Bratt,' and I have made a copy of the beautiful composition, which I shall preserve. Nora, will you be so good as to leave us alone? I have that to say to my husband which I think you would rather not hear."

Nora at once retired, not sorry to be released from the colloquy, and glad to be alone with her own exceeding happiness, which as yet she had scarcely had leisure to contemplate. Mr. Pettifer felt slightly uneasy at the prospect of a *tête-à-tête* with his offended wife.

"Now, then, Charles," said Sarah, when the door had fairly closed on Nora, "will you explain to me what all this means? It is in vain that you tell me you never went to Wolverham yesterday, and that you know no such person as Mrs. Bratt. You cannot expect me to discredit the evidence of my senses. I *saw you* standing at the door of that house in Laburnum Terrace, which you say you never entered. Nora saw you also; and, indeed, recognised you first. Then I find this photograph of the woman with whom I talked, and this letter, which shows you to be, to say the least of it, on a most familiar footing. Lastly, I discover the clothes in which you masqueraded on the Great Moor Road: I have been to your 'den,' and studied all its secrets. Now, what have you to reply? If you can speak the truth, do—for lying will not serve you; I am no longer to be deceived."

"How dare you! How *dare* you!" thundered forth Mr. Pettifer, looking as if he longed to administer a little of that personal castigation which husbands, in the good old times, were privileged to employ for the correction of a lawful spouse. But as the present dispensation strongly denounces wife-beaters, even in the lowest classes, he could scarcely, as an Anglican clergyman, resort to those demonstrations for which he felt his finger-ends were tingling. He could only use very strong language, and shout, and grind his teeth, and look about as furious as a wounded wild beast closed in by his canine pursuers.

"I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself, you impudent slut! you vile baggage, you!" he continued. "You go prying into my concerns, sneaking into my secrets, following me about like a miserable spy, as you are! What right had you, madam, to take a liberty which my first wife—my precious, sainted Ruth—never dreamed of taking? What right had you to enter the chambers in Lark Court?"

"The right of a wife! When husbands act mysteriously they must expect to provoke a prying spirit. You forced

me to search into your 'concerns,' as you call them; for when I asked you for an explanation—which was, which is, my due—I obtained nothing from you but the most abominable falsehoods. You may rave as you will; but know the top and bottom of this affair I must. To begin—confess that you were at the door of No. 7, Laburnum Terrace—at the door of this Elizabeth Bratt—yesterday afternoon, about four o'clock!"

"I shall confess nothing of the sort. It has come to a pretty pass, indeed, when a man is to be accountable to his wife for all his doings; when he cannot go here or go there on his own private business without being questioned, as if he were a child, or a serf, or a Carolina slave. I shall not reply to you, Mrs. Pettifer. You must learn to curb your ill-bred, impertinent, and most offensive curiosity."

"That is all nonsense," pursued Sarah, quietly. She was so quiet in her speech and manner, so perfectly self-possessed, so little theatrical in her tone, that Charles inwardly quailed before her, though he determined to face it out as boldly as he could. "That is, as you must know, utter nonsense, and avails you nothing. No respectable man, no decent husband, has affairs of so private a nature that his wife must know nothing of them. You cannot possibly have lawful and honourable relations with this woman whom you visit surreptitiously and in disguise, of whose very existence I was, till yesterday, ignorant."

"Very well! very well!" he replied, hastily, catching at her words. "I am not the first man who has got into a scrape, I suppose. Come, now, Sarah, don't let us quarrel any more. I admit that I told you—what—was—not precisely the truth."

"That you told me what was precisely—*a lie!*" she interrupted.

"We will waive that point. If I deceived you, it was for your own happiness. 'Where ignorance is bliss,' &c., you know! And I knew, that with your naturally jealous temperament, there would be a fine kick-up, and you would make yourself profoundly miserable and provoke me, if you were cognisant of my intimacy with Elizabeth Bratt."

Sarah gasped for breath. Was he, then, confessing his

guilt? Was he acknowledging this dreadful Wolverham woman as—— what Sarah could not bear to name, even in her thought?

Mr. Pettifer continued—"Let us talk it over calmly; you are not the first wife who has unfortunately discovered an inconvenient fact; most wives might discover something of the sort, I dare say, if they took so much unnecessary trouble."

"No, no!" protested Sarah; "men are not all bad and vile—horribly, loathsomely vile! There are good, true men in the world yet, thank God!"

"Don't use violent epithets. What is done cannot be undone; indulging in abuse and invective will not mend matters. I don't care if I never see Elizabeth Bratt again; indeed, I should be thankful to know that I never should see her again. Let that content you."

"How long have you been—what you call—intimate?"

"Years and years! It all began when I was very young—very young, indeed."

Very young, indeed, Mr. Pettifer; for your sister Betsy carried you in her arms, and shook you, and cuffed you, and washed you, when you were so fortunate as to get washed at all; and was a little mother to you, when you were a dirty, puling baby, and a small, unhappy boy, ill-fed, ill-clothed, and wretchedly forlorn; for Mrs. Pettifer, sen., was notorious in her own circle for neglect of maternal duties. And now, rather than acknowledge the kinship, you choose—foolish, infatuated man!—to allow yourself to be credited with most abominable sin and shame!

"Did Ruth know anything about it?" asked Sarah.

"No. Ruth never meddled in what did not concern her; and she had her reward, as you have yours."

"Tell me one thing, Charles—tell me the truth before God—am I your lawful wife?"

"Before God," he replied, solemnly—and there was truth in his tone—"you are my lawful wife, Sarah Pettifer!"

"I thought, perhaps, you married this woman in your youth. Bad, designing women do too often make prey of young men, and entrap them into wretched, fatal mar-

riages. And this Mrs. Bratt must be a good deal older than you are?"

"She is a good fifteen or sixteen years older than I am," replied Charles, with a grim smile.

There was something ludicrous in Sarah's mistake, although it placed him in a most uncomfortable and awkward position. Annoyed and angry as he was, he chuckled within himself at the bare notion of the fat, brawny, blowsy Betsy, at any time of her life, as a lady-love. It was always understood that she had married the late Mr. Bratt by violence; but that might have been pure scandal, for the gentleman in question and his burly bride were exceedingly well matched. Mr. Bratt, however, probably beheld charms and virtues in Miss Betsy Pettifer which her own brother never could discern; but, then, brothers never properly appreciate their sisters.

"I must say you have strange taste!" continued Sarah, looking her disgust at the photograph, which she still held in her hand. "Putting the wickedness—the shocking wickedness—out of the question, it is monstrous that you —married to me—should trouble yourself about such a *creature*. That you should find the smallest pleasure in her society! A person ill-favoured, worse than ill-bred, lliterate, vulgar, and evidently of the lowest rank in life! Why, we have not a servant in our kitchen who is not a lady compared with her; there is not a poor woman in our parish—which is not a paradise, you know!—half so revolting, and coarse, and——"

"Stop, stop, if you please!" quoth Mr. Pettifer. "I am not going to hear Betsy Bratt maligned. She has her good points."

"And you have the audacity to name her to me!" exclaimed Sarah, utterly confounded at his cool effrontery. The fury of passion was better than this quiet insolence.

"Yes, I dare!" he returned, with another little inward chuckle, thinking at the same time that, since matters had come to such an awkward pass, it might be as well, after all, to place some confidence in his wife, and relate to her the story of his early life, or, at least, such a version of it as should seem expedient. It would not be necessary to tell her everything, but all that he said would be founded upon *facts*. He made up his mind to accept the valuable

advice of the town-clerk of Ephesus, and "do nothing rashly." He would sleep upon it; and next day, if he saw fit, he would enlighten Sarah, and restore to her the comfort and dignity of which she had been, as she imagined, robbed by Betsy Bratt. Ah! little did Betsy—at that moment supping with Mr. Carridge on hot goose, with plenty of sage-and-onions and a rich gravy (she was famous for gravies, when she had the wherewithal to make them), followed by potations, strong and deep, of wonderful "Old Tom"—little did she imagine in what character she was figuring at the fireside of her reverend brother. I think, if she had known, she would have dropped her knife and fork, and rushed off to the station, to catch a late Bradfield train, that she might, ere the midnight bell tolled, present herself at "The Woodlands," and clear herself of the dreadful imputations cast upon her. Also, she had a strong sense of conjugal rights; and, as she explained to Nora's *mauvais sujet*, after Mrs. Pettifer's departure, "it went to her heart to help to cheat a poor, misfortunate wife, whose 'usban' was a gulling of her with a wengeance!" As Mr. Pettifer justly remarked, Betsy Bratt had her good points: one of them, which consisted in a burning desire to set matters right between married people supposed to be estranged, he might not have appreciated; but of his sister's sympathy with the baffled Sarah he was ignorant. The interview terminated unsatisfactorily; for Mrs. Pettifer began to feel weak, and tired, and unable to continue the combat.

Charles was not sure whether he was conqueror or conquered; but, left alone, he debated seriously whether he should not forthwith present Betsy in her true character. He, too, was wearied, and retired, at an early hour, to his luxurious, but solitary chamber. He did not miss his wife so much as might have been expected; his chief concern was—"What will the servants think?" Mrs. Grundy was always paramount with the Rev. Charles Pettifer. It was long before he fell asleep; he heard the sweet-toned timepiece in his study, close at hand, chime quarter after quarter, and strike hour after hour, and he began to think he was doomed to lie awake, chewing the bitter cud of his unpleasant meditations, till it was time to rise. Slumber at last surprised him; and, when next he was

conscious of things around him, it seemed but a few minutes since he had watched

> "The dying night lamp flicker,
> And the shadows rise and fall."

It was broad daylight. The household was astir; and, from the sounds of traffic on the road outside, he guessed that it was past his usual hour of getting up.

CHAPTER L.

THE SISTERS-IN-LAW.

It was Saturday, generally a busy day with parsons, whether "Anglican" or otherwise. Mr. Pettifer sat down to breakfast at exactly a quarter-past ten o'clock in a very ill-humour, which, for want of a more convenient scapegoat, he contrived to vent on Eastlake. That irreproachable personage bore his master's frowardness with all Christian meekness; nevertheless, he took counsel with himself in the secret retirement of his pantry, and determined that this sort of thing could not go on. "For," he argued, "I've my reputation as an Evangelical butler to maintain; and how can I advertise in the *Record* or in the *Rock* with such references as I shall have? And, what's more, master isn't quite the gentleman, and the mistress has some very common notions; and I, Benjamin Eastlake, have always served *good families!* There's Miss Nora now, quite the lady; but, then, she is neither master nor mistress. As for St. Mildred's, I don't enter it no more; and, if the master says a word, I'll give him notice on the spot! Dear me! I might draw up a very nice advertisement on those grounds; let me see!" And Eastlake began on the spot to write, commencing thus: "An experienced man-servant, willing to combine the

duties of butler with those of head-footman, and leaving his situation solely from strong religious convictions," &c., &c. Eastlake, as he folded up his composition ready for use when wanted, said complacently to himself, "There! that will tell, I think. It really reads delightfully. The question is, whether it shall be the *Record* or the *Rock*. The *Record's* the old paper; but then it is sadly behind the times, there's no denying that; and the *Rock* is not quite up to the mark. Why not try the *Christian World?*"

And here Eastlake's lucubrations were brought to an abrupt conclusion by the clanging of the morning-room bell, which summoned him to attend upon his master.

"The ladies are upstairs, I suppose?" said Mr. Pettifer, as Eastlake carried off the residue of the breakfast.

"No, sir," was the unexpected reply. "My ladies went out more than an hour ago. I don't think it was nine o'clock, sir, when they went. My mistress gave me a note, which I was to deliver next door, immediately; of course, I went at once to the cottage, and gave the note to Mr. Stanley himself."

"Do you know where they went?"

"They only drove to the station, I believe, sir. Sam will tell you. He is busy with his horses now. Shall I ask Sam, sir?"

No! Mr. Pettifer needed to make no further inquiries; he knew, as well as if he had been in his wife's confidence, that she and Nora had gone to Wolverham, and that they were intending to make a call in Laburnum Terrace. So that he would be deprived of the grace of confession—he would not even have the meagre consolation of making the momentous disclosure. It was very trying, when he had quite made up his mind to frankness—that is, to so much frankness as it might be convenient to practise. It was greatly to be feared that Betsy Bratt, when she found out how matters stood, would be inconveniently, gratuitously frank!

Mr. Pettifer's first impulse was to follow the ladies to the Great Moor Road immediately. Then he recollected that, of all days in the week, it was Saturday; that he must be at St. Mildred's by twelve o'clock to see "a penitent;" and that his sermons for the morrow were in a

most fragmentary condition. To go from home was clearly impossible; moreover, if he did go, leaving his penitent unshriven and his sermons unstudied, he would reach Wolverham too late to prevent the ingenuous disclosures of Betsy Bratt. He resolved, therefore, not to interfere, and let the worst come to the worst, if so it must be. He had sufficient philosophy, you perceive, to resign himself to the inevitable. Only an hour afterwards he was dreadfully severe with his luckless penitent, who departed—poor, foolish young woman!—with a certain sense of unabsolved sin upon her soul, and a conviction that she had somehow offended her ghostly confessor.

Meantime, Sarah and Nora had reached Wolverham in safety, and driven straight to Laburnum Terrace, where they found the charming Mrs. Bratt in a state of very decided *déshabille*, and unfeignedly astonished at the speedy reappearance of her late visitors.

"So you be come again?" she said, folding her brawny red arms in a very dirty apron, and contemplating Sarah curiously. "'Ave you found yer man yet?"

"I have found my husband, if that is what you mean," replied Sarah, with dignity. "And let me tell you, Mrs. Bratt, that he has owned to being the individual whom you were pleased to call the bagman, and that I am perfectly aware of the—— the relations between you!"

"Be danged! but I *are* glad!" returned the lady, with energy. "That's only what he did ought to a.done afore, as I've telled him often. But there! Charley Pettifer's a monstrous orkard chap to deal with, as you've found out by this time, I dessay; he's that conceited and that obstinate there's no doin' nothin' with him. He's a reg'lar pig-'eaded un, ain't he? Well, now, I take it mighty kind of you, Mrs. Pettifer, that you've come to see me as soon as you knowed who I were; and you're downright welcome, that you am!"

I cannot undertake to describe, even faintly, Sarah's consternation and disgust. Why! the wretched woman was so lost to all sense of shame, that she actually seemed to glory in her degradation! and she met her—the injured wife—with as bold a front as if she had been the most virtuous matron in Wolverham.

"How dare you speak to me?" cried Sarah, passion-

ately, losing the self-control in which, under Nora's guardianship, she had been so sedulously schooling herself. "How dare you look me in the face?—*you*, who have for ever poisoned my peace, and who ought to sink at my feet, confounded and remorseful!"

Now, Mrs. Bratt understood about one-half of Sarah's speech, but that half gave her to understand that she was accused of some crime in connection with Charles Pettifer. As the real state of the case never dawned upon her, she supposed that her brother had disclosed to his wife that involuntary surrender of the £500. Being, for her condition, a reasonable woman, she was not greatly surprised at Sarah's anger, which she resolved to pacify, if possible; only she covenanted with herself that, come what might, she would not part with the money, unless compelled to do so by the stern grasp of the law. "Come, now," she said, in what she imagined to be an irresistible, coaxing tone; "don'tee be frumpy, there's a good lady! We shall get on lots better, now we knows one another. Come in, won't yer, and have a snack o' summat? I allus gets wery peckish about this time o' the morning. An' the young lady looks as if she'd be the better for a morsel o' mate and a drop o' drink. Come, now, and let's talk it over!"

"Are you *mad*, woman?" screamed Sarah, in her wild indignation. "Don't you know that you and I can never break bread together, nor sit at the same table? Are you lost to all sense of decency? Can you suppose it possible that you and I can have any dealings together?"

"Then, whatever for did yer come 'ere?" replied Mrs. Bratt, beginning to feel chafed at her fine sister-in-law's unconcealed scorn and repulsion. "What brought you, if it warn't to make friends and be as we did ought to be? I s'pose as it's about them notes as yer riled; but, there, I won't do it no more. I was terribly tempted, you see."

"You will not do what any more?" asked Sarah, feeling quite confused.

"I won't grab the cash no more. There's my 'and upon it, as I'm an 'onest ooman."

"Do you call yourself an honest woman?" said Sarah, with quiet scorn. "And, as for the cash, I don't know what you mean, unless you intend me to understand that

the £500 which Mr. Pettifer had from me several days ago was for you. But it was not the money I was thinking about, when I questioned your being an honest woman. Honest women do not have dealings with other women's husbands."

All the virago awoke now in Mrs. Bratt's outraged bosom. She comprehended that her virtue was impeached, and, with her arms akimbo, she shouted out, her face ablaze with fury:—"Other oomen's 'usban's? What oomen's 'usban's, I should like for to know? Please to explain yerself, Mrs. Charley Pettifer! I'm not a-goin to have my ca*rac*ter took away by no fine lady—not if she's as rich an' as grand as the Queen o' Sheba. So you'll just say out what you mean, ma'am! I'm willin' to be friends, if you be; but I won't stand no nonsense. No one can cast it at me that I ever, in all my born days, had aught to do—in the way as *you* means it—with any ooman's 'usban'; an' I'll swear it, too, in every court of justice in the kingdom; I ain't quite the lady, I knows; I never got no eddication, and I'd an 'ard, bad bringin'-up—but another ooman's 'usban'! Prove yer words, Mrs. Pettifer—prove 'em, I say, or it'll be the wus for yer! Folks as blackens my ca*rac*ter, and throws dispersions on my conduck as an un'onest ooman, gits their hyes blackened with my fistes. That's my reg'lar practice, Mrs. Pettifer; and I'll none budge from it for you—though yer do be my own brother's lawful wife, as I knows yer is, becos I seed yer wed in church, as I were wed myself to poor Tommy Bratt, as is in 'eaven now."

"Your *brother's* wife, Mrs. Bratt? I did not know you had a brother! I never heard of you till the day before yesterday."

"In coorse yer didn't. It's all his fault; I wanted to be interjuced from the first. Yes, I've two brothers; maybe yer never heerd of our John out at Botany Bay; he allus wur a bad un, an' he's got a *lifer* now, for burglary with wiolence, and serve him right, say I—a man should keep his country's laws; and if he don't why he must pay the price. Now, I'm proud o' my brother Charley, though he is none so proud o' me, an' 'as allus kep' family matters dark."

Light dawned at last, though only a faint glimmering. As Betsy spoke she looked so much like Charley that it was not difficult to believe they were indeed closely related; but then, when his associations with Mrs. Bratt were interpreted in the most injurious way, when a word from him would have put things straight, he, so far from rebutting the monstrous accusation, allowed it to pass uncontradicted, and even seemed to admit the justice of it. Sarah felt more and more confused. "I cannot understand," she said, faintly; "do you mean to tell me that you are Mr. Pettifer's *sister?*"

"As sure as you're his wedded wife! We 'ad but one father and one mother to the pair on us; and if that don't make us brother and sister, I don't know what do. But I thought he telled yer! Didn't ye say that yer knew what was the relations between us?"

"He did not tell me that you were his sister."

"Then, what on earth did ye think I was to him? I'm not old enow to be his mother—though the Lord knows I was as good as a mother to him when he wur a poor, peaky little lad, as never got his bellyful, nor had a pair o' shoes to his poor feet. Many's the time I've 'ushed him to sleep in these arms, an' gone without my own vittle, to get a sup o' milk for him. But what did yer think I was? Not his sweetheart, sure?"

"What else could I think, not knowing that Mr. Pettifer had a sister, or indeed any female relation? And, indeed, he seemed to admit that you were—what you say!"

"Laws, now! I never! I never in all my born days!" exclaimed Mrs. Bratt, bursting into fits of laughter. "That do beat all! Charley's *sweetheart!* Why, if I 'adn't bin his lawful sister, he'd never have touched me with a pair o' tongs; I be a nice un, I be, for a gentleman's sweetheart! Well, I never!" And Betsy laughed till the tears streamed down her cheeks, the mistake appearing to afford her infinite amusement. "Well," she continued, as soon as she could speak intelligibly; "I don't wonder at yer being so huffy, speaking so free as I did to yer, and yer thinking I wur *that!* Why, if I'd seen the ooman as I thought was my poor, dear Bratt's sweetheart, I'd have tored her hyes out, there and then,

and thought I'd done my dooty. I think yer took it beautiful; an' I'm proud on yer, sister-law Sarah! An' as for you, my prutty un"—turning to Nora—"I've wanted to give yer a kiss, ever since I saw yer at Charley's weddin'. The hangils can't be 'andsomer nor you, I'm sure! it makes me feel good to look at yer. An' now let's all be 'appy together. I'll shut up shop for to-day; I don't do much in general; what I said about the run on Noah's Harks were a cram, just to put yer off, 'cos I'd promised Charley I wouldn't split upon him. Let's go in and get a snack."

They followed Betsy into the back room, and sat down at her request. "Now, what'll ye take?" she asked, vivaciously. Betsy was never so happy as when dispensing hospitality. "Will ye 'ave a rasher of 'am briled, and a hegg poached? I've some cold goose in the pantry; but p'r'aps that might go again yer stomachs in the mornin', for its rayther overdone with seasoning. I wur too 'eavy 'anded with the injens."

Nora silently wondered what *engines* could be required in cooking a goose; not a steam-engine, surely!

"We should like a cup of coffee, if it would not be giving you too much trouble," said Mrs. Pettifer, who felt quite amiably disposed; it was such a relief to find that Charles was not the scoundrel he had appeared to be. "A cup of coffee and a slice of bread-and-butter would be very nice, Mrs. Bratt."

"Don't 'Mrs. Bratt' me! Call me Betsy, and I'll call you Sairey. I knows yer name, you sees. You shall have the best I've got; I likes a cup of good coffee, hot and strong and sweet, myself, so I allus keeps some of the best in the 'ouse—I'll grind some fresh this minit—and I allus keeps the kettle near upon the bile—a kettle full of cold water on the 'ub isn't no good, is it? There's a wench next door as runs on errands for me, and she'll get a penn'orth o' cream; and then we'll talk, and I'll tell yer anythink yer'd like to know about the family as yer 'ave married into, for I guess Charley ain't told yer much—at least, *no facks!* Charley don't stick to facks—never did!"

That was just what Sarah wished. Of course she wanted now to know the real truth about the Pettifers;

and she was quite aware that the truth she would never get from Charles. She had found out long since that he did not "stick to facks."

Mrs. Bratt bustled about, made the coffee, and set the table, bringing out with great parade a clean damask table-cloth—a luxury in which she never indulged except upon state occasions. The coffee was excellent—clear, and strong, and well-flavoured—only Mrs. Bratt drank hers out of a mug; her fingers never would hold tea-cups, with teeny, fiddling handles, she remarked; she always dropped them, and let them get smashed. And she liked her coffee with "something in it"—meaning something alcoholic—and was quite disappointed when Sarah and Nora refused a drop—just a drop—of real French brandy in their cups. "Quality don't take sperrits in their tea and coffee, I s'pose," said Mrs. Bratt, as she poured a liberal allowance of Cognac into her own mug; "but *I* think coffee's poor stuff without a dash o' brandy; and tea's just cat-lap if it 'aven't a spoonful or so of good gin in it. At least, them's my sentiments. Now, Sairey, what shall I tell yer fust?"

"Tell me how Charles became a clergyman. If he was brought up as you say, how could he receive any sort of education?"

"You may well arks! It's bin a mystery to me ever since it began. I did not think once as he wur a real, proper-made parson, but on'y a sham; but I s'pose he's all right. Leastways, he says he is—tho' that ain't much, 'cos he allus says what soots 'im. Shall I tell yer from the time he wur a babby?"

"That will be best, I think."

"Well, I must tell it like a story, and I'll stick to facks, tho' some of 'em is ugly enow. It's my maxim as there shouldn't be no secrets among brothers and sisters, nor 'atween 'usban' and wife. The Pettifers, you see, was allus a bad lot. My father—of course Charley's father—wur a reg'lar wagabone and raskill. He wur married to my mother; for Charley went and got what they call a sustificate, and I've got it locked up in my best tea-caddy. Not that I cared whether they was married or not; it made no odds to me, tho' Charley said it did make odds to him. My father, as I said,

wur a scamp, if ever there wur one; my mother was a poor, weak, shilly-shally, milk-and-water woman, allus a cryin' and a moanin', and never tryin' to mend matters. There was seven of us; but there's only three alive—John at Botany Bay, me, and your Charley. I was the eldest; and a pretty 'ard life I 'ad of it, with a father as drank, and fought, and kep' commin' to grief; and a mother as wasn't much better than a born nat'ral. John went to the bad afore he wur twelve years old; he'd enjoyed penal suffitude several times afore he wur twenty-five; he's about fifty now, and he's got a *lifer;* and he's that rampageous that he'll never get his ticket-o'-leave, or keep it a month if he does get it. Mary was burnt to death, thro' being left alone in the 'ouse, when she wur four years old. Jim and Sam went to work in a coal-mine just t'other side o' Dringfield, and got killed by a splosion. Patty, the one next to me, got into trouble, and died young.

"I was about sixteen when our Charley wur born; and mother, she jest brought him into the world, and took no more heed of him. Well, I took to him; and I felt as if I'd borned him myself I loved him so. I 'ad him night and day; I did the best I could for him, tho' bad wur the best sometimes. I've worked for him, and starved for him, and begged for him. He was a 'cute little chap, and he soon got to do little jobs, and hearn a penny; he'd 'old an 'orse when he wur on'y seven years old; and he'd tinkle a bell, and sell muffins for the bakers; and at last I got him a reg'lar place—for I tried hard to keep him 'onest and 'spectable. Father went off over seas, and died; and mother died, too; John was allus in some stone-jug or other, so we two was left alone in the wide world.

"Well, Sairey; Charley got on! 'I means to get on,' he ses to me one day. He saved up his pennies and his sixpences, and got better and better wages. He'd a fair ca*rac*ter, for he wur hindustrious; and, though he didn't stick to facks, he never boned not an 'arpenny's worth. So it went on till he wur a young man, drawing his eighteen shillin's a week, and beer money, in a cooper's yard. Then he took to larning, but he didn't negleck his work; for when he wur four or five and twenty he got to be foreman at some 'works' at Darley. He wur a

Methodiss then, and a local preacher; and I do believe as he wur more in earnest and stuck more to facks *then* than he ever 'ave since. Somehow, he go to know a lady; she was elder than himself by a good piece, and she went and fell in love with our Charley, and they agreed to make a match of it. She'd money—not a deal, but enough to make a Church parson of him, and that was what he'd set his 'eart on. So he goes to St. Bees, a place where they make parsons cheap and easy, where them as don't know much can, what they call, '*pass*'—which means, get the lisunce, I s'pose, as makes 'em parsons. Anyhow, Charley got his'n, and set up as curate in the north; and he married Miss Ruth Mason, and in time came to be minister of that Eppiskopple Chapel as is now turned into St. Mildred's. And all the rest, you knows."

"But why did Charles disown you, to whom he owed everything?"

"Well, it was his fad to pass for a real gennleman, and no gennleman born 'ud 'ave such as me for his sister. We've got some tidy cousins in the greengrocery line; and one as is a butcher, well-to-do, and kills hisself; and one as is married to a small linen-draper—all 'spectable people, tho' not by no means gennlefolks; but Charley won't have naught to do with any of 'em. Ses he, 'I'll stick to you, Betsy, for sake o' old times, and I'll do what I can fur yer'—it was when I was fust left a lone widder oonan as he said it—'but,' ses he, 'yer mustn't never appear to be my sister, nor no relation at all to me. I should be ruined if it got wind that you was my lawful sister.' Well, I never could refuse Charley nothink, and them's the terms we've been on these years and years. When he come to see me he allus wore them clothes, and travelled third-class, and he was never caught till the day afore yesterday. It was to be, I s'pose! And just as well too, for now we've no more secrets, and we may as well enjoy each other's company. I won't never intrude myself upon ye, Sairey; but I'd like to come and see yer fine 'ouse when you 'aven't no company. You can say I are Charley's old nuss, if yer like, and I'll dine with the suvants, and 'old my tongue. I don't envy him being a grand gennleman, I'm sure, and I wouldn't do nothink to hurt him. And I'm glad it's all come out, ain't you?"

"Very glad," said Sarah, gravely. "I am much obliged to you, Mrs. Bratt—I mean Betsy—and I think Charles owes everything in the world to you, and I will take care he never neglects you again."

Whereupon Mrs. Bratt melted into tears, and embraced the ladies warmly, exclaiming, "There, now! I knew we should be friends! You're a nice-spoken, good-'earted lady, and he said you was a wixen! But there!—a saint out of 'eaven would never please *him*. I'm so glad you've comed! It's the 'appiest day of my life!" And Mrs. Bratt again lifted up her voice and wept, and embraced her new-found relatives, for she persisted in regarding Nora as her niece. Nora could not help wishing that "Aunt Betsy" were less addicted to onions, and ardent spirits, and tobacco. It is not pleasant to be kissed by a person who has indulged freely over night in onions, and gin, and unlimited pipes. Pipes were Mrs. Bratt's little weakness; she knew they were unfeminine, and she always smoked them in private. She had no unnecessary scruples as to alcoholic liquors; but her violent passion for tobacco she tried to keep to herself, and imagined she succeeded. But onions, strong drinks, and tobacco have, one and all, a sad trick of betraying themselves, regardless of consequences.

A good deal of conversation followed, and at last Mrs. Pettifer said they must be going back to Bradfield. It was almost three o'clock in the afternoon. Nora was anxious to return, for her aunt had promised to see Ernest Stanley that evening, if he could spare the time. Sarah, on the whole, was going home immensely relieved. Her husband had *not* committed the unpardonable sin of which he had allowed himself to be accused; and, in the fulness of her heart, she felt she could forgive him anything else. Things were bad enough; but they might have been worse. Sarah began to feel that she had brought all her troubles upon herself—a reflection which is never consolatory, though it may be philosophic.

But—as earthquakes occur in little batches—there was yet another shock in store for Mrs. Pettifer. Miss Lane had not, as you may well believe, forgotten the "*mauvais sujet*" who had been in that very room where they had enjoyed their coffee. Mrs. Pettifer never thought at all

about him, which, considering the extraordinary revelations made by her hostess, was not at all unnatural; but Nora was wondering what had become of him, and whether he would appear.

Mrs. Bratt took the ladies upstairs to her own chamber, and gave them the comfort of warm water and clean towels. As may be imagined, Mrs. Bratt's sleeping apartment was not a bower of elegance, or even of comfort. It lacked cleanliness, and, still more, ventilation, its fair occupant being an enemy to open windows and unclosed chimneys. It was almost an article of religion with her to keep both rigorously, and, as far as possible, hermetically, shut. Consequently Sarah and Nora were glad to make a very expeditious toilet. They were just going down the dark, narrow, break-neck stairs when Mrs. Bratt opened the door of the front room, in order to give them light; and with the light came a refreshing current of air, for the front-room window was wide open.

"This is my best room," said Betsy, signing to them to enter; "but I likes the back o' the 'ouse best—it's quieter, and I should 'ear if anybody got to the fowls or to the pig. So I lets my lodger, Mr. Carridge, 'ave this 'ere room. I brought yer in to see the prospeck. Yer can see right away to Dringfield Church, and beyond!"

"Was that Mr. Carridge to whom you spoke the other day?" asked Nora.

"Yes, that 'wur Carridge; I 'ad him down in Denver Lane. I used to take in single men, and do for 'em; they wasn't all single men, but, if their wives didn't come about 'em, it was no odds. I allus set my face again married couples in my 'ouse; married folk do quarrel so!—leastways, that's my 'sperience. Carridge, tho' he's mighty strong in the arms, is weak in the chest, or somewhere in his inside, and he 'ad to 'ave the doctor and be physicked not many weeks back; and the doctor, he said, 'Git out of the smoke into purer hair;' and so Carridge begged me to keep him on; and I let him stay, for I knew as I'd this room to spare, and he'd be company."

"Does he follow any trade?" asked Nora.

"I can't say he does; he's a *hagent*, he ses. Sometimes he stops away a spell; he's gone to Manchester now, on bisness, with his pardners, he ses. He won't be back yet

awhile. But he thinks a deal o' fresh hair, so he 'most made me swear to keep his winder wide open from mornin' till night while he wur away."

Suddenly Sarah gave a suppressed shriek, and sat down, white and trembling, on Mr. Carridge's bed. She seemed unable to speak; but she pointed towards a corner, where there were half-a-dozen old boxes piled up. "There it is! there it is! I should know it among a thousand!" she gasped out, as soon as she found utterance.

Mrs. Bratt thought "sister-in-law Sairey" had suddenly taken leave of her senses. Nora was frightened, but could not understand her aunt's state of agitation. "What is it, *ma tante!*" she asked, anxiously.

"She don't think she sees ghosts or bogles, do she?" inquired Betsy. "I knew a lad as was allus seeing ghosts and devils in broad daylight, and they said it wur 'pectral allusions; but the doctor said it were delirium tremblings. There's nothing there but old boxes and my winter cloak hanged up."

It was several minutes before Mrs. Pettifer recovered anything like composure; but, when she could speak quietly and intelligibly, she said, with an awed solemnity which Nora could well understand, "Nora! *that is the box!* the box that always stood under my poor father's bed! the box that was carried away that dreadful night!"

"That box with the brass 'andle?" asked Betsy, coming to the rescue. "Why, that's Carridge's box. He's had it ever since I knowed him."

"How long have you known him?" inquired Nora.

"Not more nor two years. He's allus paid me reg'lar; and, when he 'aven't got the glumps—for he's a summat on his mind constant—he is very good company. And he can read and write, which I can't: he is useful to me often."

"I have known him quite three years," said Nora, quietly.

"You knowed him, my prutty lass? You knowed such as he?"

"I mean that I first saw him three years ago;" and she was going to add, "and he knows me," when it suddenly occurred to her that the less said about Carridge the better.

Sarah went to the corner, and brought the box to the bed. "There!" she said, as she put it down on the patchwork counterpane; "open it, one of you! The key is in it. It is lined with blue and brown paper—a piece left over from what the attic walls at Salamanca House were papered with, Nora. It ought to be full of papers—family papers; and there might be some old letters in it."

"I'll open it," said Mrs. Bratt. "There is some old letters in it. I declare it must be yours! I wonder how Carridge come by it."

The letters were very old and very yellow, and belonged to the bygone postal dispensation, when penny stamps were all unheard of. There were six or eight of them, not more; but they all bore one signature—"Sarah Anne Oldham," and they were all addressed, as far as the pale writing could be deciphered, to "Mr. Thomas Lane, Salamanca House, Poplar Street, St. Oswald's, Bradfield, Midlandshire."

"My mother wrote those letters," said Sarah, touching them with an instinctive reverence. "She must have written them quite fifty years ago, for they are signed in her maiden name."

"Yes, yes; I know!" interrupted Nora. "My papa was Thomas Oldham Lane. Oh, *ma tante!* but this is most marvellous."

"I must take this box away with me," said Sarah, addressing Mrs. Bratt; "it is my own; and what it contains is mine—only there were other things in it when it was stolen."

"Stolen, were it? Tell us about it, Sairey."

Mrs. Pettifer explained as briefly as possible, while Betsy held up her hands in unaffected horror and dismay. "That's it!" she said, when the narrative came to an end. "That's what's bin on his mind; he was one of 'em as killed your father, Sairey, you may depend upon it! I allus had my doubts of him; he wur that queer! And yet, he's a nicish chap! When he wur bad once, I tended him; and when he got a little wrong in his 'ead, he kep a-saying to hisself, very low, so as I could 'ardly 'ear him: 'She mun be righted; I mun see her righted afore I die.' And when he wur getting better, I used to hear him muttering, when he did not think I wur so near, 'God

forgive me! God forgive me! but I didn't hit him so hard! I didn't mean to do it.' Now, I understands it all. What's to be done? Shall you give him up to justice?"

"I don't know," said Sarah, slowly. "I must think what I ought to do. Nora, I shall place this box in Mr. Salisbury's hands as soon as he comes home, and I must consult with him. He will advise me, of course."

"That will be the best plan, *ma tante*. And, as Mr. Carridge is to be absent for some days, would it not be well that Mrs. Bratt should keep this event quite secret? It seems to me that the less said about it, in the way of mere talking, the better!"

"I'll not breathe a word," said Mrs. Bratt, feeling that she was treated as one of the family. "Trust yer Aunt Betsy, my dear, for keeping a thing dark. Only mind, both on yer, *I* didn't peach on Carridge! I'd no notion the box wasn't his own, as much as that there cloak is mine. You see, Carridge is a sort o' pal, and I don't like to 'elp bring him into trouble. But it do seem as if it was to be. I shouldn't wonder if it isn't what the parsons call '*Providence!*'"

A cab being obtained, Nora and her aunt drove away to the station, taking the important box with them. All the way home Sarah was remarkably silent; "and no wonder," thought Nora, "for how much has happened!" How much, indeed! For since the sun rose upon that eventful Saturday—since noon, in fact—Sarah had learned the family history of the Pettifers, discovered a sister-in-law, and found a clue to the tragedy of Salamanca House.

When they reached home they found the house very quiet and still; the master, Eastlake said, was in his study busy with his sermons, and was not to be disturbed on any account. They had tea together; but they scarcely talked at all, and then Ernest Stanley was announced. "I cannot see him to-night; indeed, I cannot!" said poor Sarah, putting her hands to her head. "Everything happens all at once! But go to him, Nora; tell him it is all right; I give my full consent. I must talk to Charles, even if the St. Mildred's congregation go without a sermon to-morrow."

So Nora went into the drawing-room to spend a delight-

ful hour with her lover, and Sarah went to the study, where she found Charles, pale, wearied, and agitated, struggling with the first head of his second sermon. She went up to him, and putting her hand on his shoulder, "Charles," she said—and she wondered at her own composure—"I have seen Mrs. Bratt, and I know everything. Forgive me, that I thought you capable of such wickedness! Of course you ought to have told me all about yourself before we married; but *that* I forgive. What I learned from your sister was far from pleasant, as you must know; still, it is so much better than what I feared, that I cannot be very miserable, and I am thankful to know the truth. Oh, Charles! you will not deceive me again, will you? We are married, and we have perhaps many years of life before us; let us try to do each other good, and make each other happy; let us try to serve God together, purely and sincerely, as we have never done before! I will do my best, Charles, dear; won't you?"

And there poor Sarah fairly broke down, and sobbed, with her arms round her husband's neck; for whatever his birth might be, and however numerous his faults, she loved him truly. Any other man would have been melted into gratitude and tenderness; but Sarah erred when she asked him, in the fulness of her heart, to forgive her for the mistake into which he himself had led her, and which, to his shame, he had actually encouraged. It had seemed easier to him to bear the reproach of a vile, degrading intrigue, than to own to his low, disreputable parentage. His wife's forbearance and generosity were utterly thrown away upon him. He put her away from him, not quite gently, saying: "And now that you have routed out all my secrets, I hope you are quite happy. I only wish I had my poor Ruth back again; *she* never pried into my affairs, or accused me of keeping a mistress! There! go away, and don't worry me a minute longer. I've only just begun my evening's sermon, and you've driven every idea clean out of my head. Go away, I say, and keep away!"

Sarah went away with the fountain of her tears dried up; but she was as one broken-hearted, for she comprehended now how small was the soul, how mean the intellect, how debased the spirit of the man with whom she had linked her fate irrevocably.

CHAPTER LI.

SARAH'S LEGAL ADVISER.

"LET me put off my visit, *ma tante!*" said Nora, early in the week that succeeded to that eventful Saturday. She had that morning received a few lines from Gertrude Bethell, begging her to come to them at once. And Mrs. Pettifer replied:—"No, child, I will not keep you; you shall go and enjoy yourself with your friends; you have done all for me that you can do, and you have been a great comfort to me. My husband and I understand each other now; at least, I know the whole truth, and he is aware that I know it. Whether we shall ever be happier together I cannot tell; but no one, not even you, can help us. Husband and wife must settle their disputes for themselves, and I think it would not be the worse for us if we were left alone together. You see, Nora, we are married; nothing can alter that. And being united, for better for worse, it is certainly wisest to make the best of our lot. I am willing to overlook all that has gone before, though I am afraid I shall not be able to feel anything like confidence in what Mr. Pettifer says or does."

"I do not see how you can, *ma tante.* He has deceived you most shamefully. It seems to me that he married you altogether under false pretences."

"And so I suppose he did, inasmuch as he professed to be a gentleman of good family. Why, Nora! he actually sneered at the Lanes for being simply respectable,—'of no birth or lineage,' as he put it,—only several weeks ago. And when I think of the heaps of untruths —the base lies he has told me,—but there! I had better not think; it will do no good. And I have only myself to thank for all that has come upon me. Of course I cannot feel as I did towards Charles; yet still I cannot

turn against him. I want him to put the past away, and begin again, with kindly, affectionate feelings, if not with the old happy love that is gone, I suppose, for ever. He is my husband, the only man I ever really cared for, and he is my little Minnie's father. She must not grow up to perceive a breach between her parents."

Nora was lost in admiration of her aunt—her aunt, once so violent, and selfish, and unreasonable. And, indeed, Mrs. Pettifer was wonderfully changed. All unconsciously she had been learning lesson after lesson, ever since her marriage. In Charles's faults—many of them, at least—she saw a distorted reflection of her own; his arrogance, his love of command, his narrowness, his harsh judgments, his tyrannical impulses, were, one and all, hideous exaggerations of her own long-cherished habits and sentiments. The miserable self-sufficiency with which for so many years she had wrapped herself about, fell from her like a worn-out garment; she began —at first dimly, soon clearly—to perceive that other people might be right, and certainly sincere, even though they differed from her on what she termed essentials and points of vital import. The next step was to doubt herself and the whole system on which her life had been built up till now, when she owned to herself—"It has been all one huge, long mistake! My religion has been founded on the sand. It was not religion; for religion is not saving one's soul, escaping from the wrath to come, as poor Leo Bunn taught us. Oh, no! it is something more than that! It is seeking to be near God; to be like Him as He was manifest in Christ; to be loving, gentle, trustful, unselfish. And who has been more selfish than I? Have I not thought of self *first?* Have I not exalted self into a sort of idol? Because I loved no one passionately and absorbingly, I thought the Apostle's command, 'Little children, keep yourself from idols,' did not and could not apply to *me.* I told myself, in my Pharisaical-publican spirit—which valued *itself* for saying, 'Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner'—that I loved no creature more than I loved God. Ay, but I did—*I did!* I loved myself. I took for my idol the basest thing of all—*my mean,* loveless, unlovely *self!* It was all self—it was what *I* believed, what *I* thought, what *I*

approved! Even the Bible was a stumbling-block, for I made it the interpreter of my own errors; and I found in it a God whom now I know to be no God at all; but only a fierce, cruel, vindictive tyrant, born of my own diseased imagination, and of the terrible doctrines which, from my earliest days, I was taught to receive as truth. And now I am free—I am free! God has made me free. He has brought me out of the House of Bondage; He has shown me that, as He is love—love incarnate, as manifested in Christ—so must His children love with a pure heart fervently, not only Himself, but all with whom they have any dealings."

And so, for the first time for forty years, Sarah began to have—

"A heart at leisure from itself,
To soothe and sympathise;"

and, tried and troubled as she really was, as she had never been before, she felt a glow within, and a settled peace, which was as new as it was delightful. Only a few months back she would have reproached Nora at the bare idea of being left; she would have argued that Nora, being as her own child, had nothing in the world to do but to minister to her, and do her pleasure—for that children were given to parents, that the greatest possible amount of service of one sort or another might be got out of them, was one of the strange notions which Sarah had somehow imbibed, as she had many others equally false and unnatural, from the teaching of her youth. Now, it was far otherwise; that God had sent Nora to be her greatest comfort in the day of her extremity, she distinctly recognised; but she perceived also that Nora was given to her to be cherished and cared for, that Nora had a right to live her life, and that she, the aunt—it would have been the same had she been the mother—had no right to impose upon her a life which should be a copy merely of her own. She wanted Nora to be happy, and to be happy in her own way.

A great many people make this grand mistake, that they wish other people to be happy after their own style and pattern, forgetting, or refusing to acknowledge, the obvious and established fact that what to one person is content and joy, is to another weariness and pain. All people, even all good people, cannot be after one pattern. That old

Scotchman, who said to his friend, who argued for more uniformity, "The Maister on us a' ha' mony mair moulds in His workshop than Ha's tell't to you or me aboot," spoke a truth as deep as the deep sea, and as broad as God's own "spacious firmament on high." God made some for the busy life of the great world, and some for the quiet seclusion of the rustic homestead. Some He wills to toil amid the city's ceaseless roar; others to labour in the fields to the music of the lark's canticle, to the sweet symphonies of the rustling leaves and running brooks. Some must serve Him in the crowds, some in silent contemplation; and no one, man nor woman, can do another's work so well, so perfectly, as his or her own. Doubtless, in old time, there were those who served God best in the cloister. I scarcely think any can so serve Him best *now*, for the purpose of the past is accomplished, and the purpose of the present is quite another thing; but certainly, in ages gone, monks and nuns had a work to do, which, being done, no longer appertains to them; and it seems to me that those who set themselves apart from their fellow-creatures in order to live a life of prayer, and toil, and privation, cannot do God half the service that those can who stand ready in the great thoroughfares of the world to do His will and promote His glory. Toil, unless it be to a good end, is mere base drudgery; self-imposed burdens borne, and self-denial practised for its own sake, is not acceptable to the Lord, who has given us all things richly to enjoy, and who delights in our happiness as the loving earthly father delights in the innocent pleasures of his children. I have heard people say they like to live in the shade. That seems very much like quarrelling with God's blessed sunshine; and people who love the shade are generally so fond of it that they not only seek it for themselves, but make a shade for others, who would fain get out into the kindly warmth and light. Good things do not prosper in the shade. You cannot make choice flowers flourish in the shade, which is sure to be cold and dank. The fruit that grows on the north wall seldom ripens—it is crude and sour to the last. Very few things that are good for anything will thrive in the shade; but poisonous, harmful things do best without the sunshine. In the cold, damp cleft you find the snake and

the toad; and nightshade expands its lurid bells beneath the sunless arch. There are many lovely blossoms that need *shelter*—which is a modified shade—as the violet, the lily of the valley, and the wood anemone; but none of these are so fair and so sweet as when they catch the glory of the sunshine, and feel its warm, life-creating beam through the leafy screen that shields them from the early blasts.

Yet sometimes God sees shade to be needful; and He sends it. He sends the shade of the sick room, of exile, of solitary imprisonment; but that is quite another thing from obstinately seeking the shade for oneself. The gardener may see fit to put certain of his choice plants in the shade during the heat and glare of the noon-day, or because they are running to leaf instead of to flower—and an unhealthy growth must be checked; but this is only that they may bear the sunshine afterwards.

It was this sort of thing which slowly, very slowly, Sarah was beginning to recognise in her dealings with others, and in the regulation of her own conduct. And so now it came to pass that, instead of fretfulness and upbraiding, Nora found in her aunt consideration, kindness, and even cheerfulness; and she insisted on her paying the visit which, long promised, had been from various causes long deferred. She was content that Nora should have her pleasure; she was happy in the knowledge that Nora at St. Oswald's would be enjoying herself. It is astonishing how much happiness may be found in seeking unselfishly the happiness of others. He that grudges another's happiness in order to secure his own, is pretty sure to find himself balked and disappointed.

From the Saturday evening Mr. Pettifer had not spoken to Nora; he did not even recognise her presence. If Eastlake had not attended to her creature comforts at meal times, she would often have gone hungry and thirsty. An ill-bred man is almost certain to be sulky when offended; indeed, none but a thoroughly ill-bred person can persist in sulks. Neither did Mr. Pettifer hold any conversation with his wife, though he spoke to her occasionally in short, brusque sentences and angry tones, very much as if he were speaking to a dog. And it irked him greatly that Sarah was patient under this treatment; her

calmness really made him quite uneasy. To show that, for her, the feud was at an end, she had intended going back to her own room. But when she tried the door on Saturday night she found it locked; and her amiable partner, issuing from his study, said, "What do you want in *my* room? I choose to keep it locked; you went away for your own pleasure, now you will stay away for mine. *I* don't want you!"

So Sarah comprehended that she was in disgrace; and, as things were, she was not sorry to be left to her own undisturbed reflections.

Matters, however, did not mend. As days passed on, life at "The Woodlands" began to be excessively uncomfortable. It was quite as well that Nora should go away; perhaps Mr. and Mrs. Pettifer might come to a better understanding if left entirely to their own resources. It was Friday, however, before Nora had made all her preparations. Mrs. Pettifer was to go with her in the carriage as far as Mr. Salisbury's office; for she had received a note from him, stating that he had returned home, and would keep a portion of the morning disengaged for her, if she chose to appoint an interview. She had expressly forbidden him to wait on her at "The Woodlands," giving him to understand that her business was strictly private.

"Good-bye, Nora," said Mrs. Pettifer, as she alighted at the lawyer's door. "I shall take care of you, you may be sure; I shall tell everything to Mr. Salisbury. I *must*, or how can I explain my presence in Mrs. Bratt's front chamber?" And while she spoke Eastlake, who was in attendance, carried the treasure trove into Mr. Salisbury's premises.

"That will do," said Mrs. Pettifer, holding it with both her hands, as Eastlake set it down. "Now attend Miss Lane to St. Oswald's Rectory, and be sure to see that she has all her packages. You need not call for me as you return. I shall walk home, or take a cab from the Town Hall."

Mr. Salisbury was quite disengaged, and Sarah was at once conducted to his private room. "Good morning, Mrs. Pettifer," he said, gaily, as she entered. "I am sorry I happened to be from home last week when you

required my services—important business in town, a complicated will-case, in which a client of mine was concerned. You are not looking very well. Allow me to relieve you of that huge package."

For Sarah had had the box wrapped in paper, as she did not wish it to be noticed; and Mr. Salisbury, though given to plain speaking, especially when his clients seemed resolved to commit a foolish action, was a very courteous old gentleman, and gallant where the ladies were concerned. He guessed partly what was coming; for he had felt certain that, sooner or later, Sarah would fly to him for counsel, and for such legal protection as could be obtained.

"I came last week," said Sarah, in her own natural, sharp, abrupt tones, "to give you instructions respecting my will. I want that attended to directly. I *can* make a will, can I not?"

"Yes; your father's will provided for that. Your money is your own—that is, all that your father left you. Mr. Pettifer cannot touch the principal without your consent; but he can take what he likes of your income. He can spend to the outside of that income, and beyond if he choose."

"If I die without a will?"

"Your daughter will chiefly inherit; but Mr. Pettifer, as the child's father and natural guardian, will have almost unlimited power over the property. You are quite right not to delay so important a duty. You doubtless wish to secure something to your niece, Miss Nora?"

"It is chiefly on her account that I am so anxious to settle my affairs. Life is uncertain, and if I were suddenly called hence she who has been to me as a daughter would be left without a penny; though I must tell you she is about to marry."

"Indeed! I am glad to hear it. I trust it is a marriage which you approve?"

"Entirely so. Nora is engaged to Mr. Stanley, the minister of Carvary."

If Mrs. Pettifer had said that her niece was betrothed to the town-crier, Mr. Salisbury could scarcely have been more astonished. He was not cognisant of the great change which had passed over his client. He had found

her at their last interview much subdued, but he had no notion of what was really the case; and, knowing as he did Sarah's past contempt for Dissenters, and indeed for all who presumed to differ from her in opinion, he could not at all understand how she came to give her sanction to such a union. But he only replied, "Surely, surely! A very excellent young man, and talented too. Will be a representative man, no doubt, in a few years. Of very good family, also, if I am not mistaken. Belongs to the Stanleys, of Downshire, I think. I congratulate Miss Nora. And you desire to make a settlement upon the young lady?"

"Yes; I am, as you know, under forty years of age, and I *may* live out my threescore years and ten; the Lanes are long-lived; poor Tom took after his mother, and the Oldhams, none of them, pass middle life. And I do not see why Nora should wait for her portion till I am in my coffin, and she herself an elderly woman. I wish to settle a handsome sum upon her at once, for she must not go empty-handed to her husband. I can do this, I believe?"

"Happily, you can, Mrs. Pettifer. Your father's will enables you to do it, else I do think I should have done something desperate to stop your marriage. You may endow hospitals or build lunatic asylums with your fortune if you please; though, if you do, I dare say there will be an injunction in Chancery obtained against you as an alleged lunatic."

"I don't want to do anything unreasonable; but I must tell you, Mr. Salisbury, that I am nearly sure that my husband would interfere, if he knew that I wished to convey a large sum of money absolutely to my niece. He could not prevent my doing as I choose with my own, I suppose; I mean that he could not legally defeat my intention; but, as you know, a great deal may be done to constrain a person—a wife especially—that is not legal, and which yet cannot be put down as illegal."

"Undoubtedly, dear madam. Your husband, though he has no power at all over your inheritance, has yet immense power over the person of his wife. An unworthy husband—of course, I am not referring to Mr. Pettifer—may use constraint, restraint, or intimidation, and so

cajole a woman out of her just rights; he may compel her signature, you know; or he may obtain it by fraud. Of course, I refer now to the case of a thoroughly unworthy and unprincipled husband."

"I think," said Sarah, grimly, "no man living will ever make me sign any document against my will, or against my judgment; and most certainly I could not be reduced into subscribing my signature to anything which I did not fully comprehend. I may as well tell you, Mr. Salisbury, that you were right—my marriage was—well! to some extent, *a mistake.* You told me I did not know who I was marrying, and I did not; I think I had better inform you in confidence of what I have discovered." And then Sarah told the strange tale of the Wolverham revelations, and the remarkable episode of the supposed bagman, and sister Betsy Bratt. Mr. Salisbury, though little given to mirth, and really sorry for Sarah, could not help laughing heartily at the recital, but he felt more disgust than he cared to show at the baseness of the man who permitted his wife to assume his criminality rather than confess his humble origin and connections.

"And now I have something still stranger to tell you," said Sarah, when he fully understood the history and mystery of the Pettifers. And as she spoke she began to remove the paper-wrappings of the box she had brought with her. Mr. Salisbury naturally assisted her; but, before the last sheet of newspaper was flung aside, he started, changed colour, and let go the brass handle as if it had burned his fingers; for he at once recognised that veritable box, in which several times he had seen old Mr. Lane rummaging for his papers and memoranda.

"By George!" he cried, turning to his client, "*you have found it!* And without the police, I'll bet you a sovereign!"

"Without the police, certainly! I found it by the merest accident. Mrs. Bratt took us into her front room, which is let to a lodger; and there, uncovered, open to the view of any one who entered the chamber, was what I thought I should never see again. I quite believed the thieves had destroyed it, and I only wonder they did not."

"And so do I! If I had been concerned in stealing

that box, I would have burned it and all it contained before the night grew into morning. It is very curious the blunders these crafty rogues every now and then commit. But it is awkward that it should be found in the house of your husband's sister! I suppose Mrs. Bratt is not an accomplice?"

"I think not; I am almost sure not. She is by no means particular, I am afraid, whom she harbours in her house; and she is not troubled, evidently, with a very tender conscience; but she had no idea, I feel certain, that the man Carridge was the character he proves to be; for at our first visit Nora recognised him, and knew him for the person whom we do not doubt was concerned with that wicked cook in the attempted burglary on our premises at Arleston. She knew him also for a vagabond who had frightened her in Ashton churchyard these three years back, just before we left Salamanca House; and—this is the queerest part of all!—he knew her, and asked if she were named Leonora Lane, and if she were old Lane's granddaughter!"

"That is queer indeed! for the young lady is always spoken of as 'Nora.' Only her intimate friends, I should imagine, know that her name is Leonora?"

"Very few know her to be properly 'Leonora,' for she always signs herself 'Nora.' I am not sure that her intended, young Stanley, knows what her name really is; I never myself think of her as my niece *Leonora*."

"What else did the fellow say to Miss Lane?"

"Having satisfied himself as to her identity, he told her to remember that he was her friend; and then he paid her some coarse compliments on her beauty, which scared her so much that she took to her heels and ran away; and I don't wonder, poor girl. She has always called him in her own mind a '*mauvais sujet*' ever since."

"A *mauvais sujet*, indeed! Mrs. Pettifer, there is more in this than appears on the surface; I shall have to trouble Miss Lane for her deposition. That man has read the papers which were in this box. Among them, doubtless, there was reference to Miss Leonora Lane. Of course you will at once take proceedings against this person for having your property in his possession—this box, and

these letters; and he must be compelled to give an account of the other documents which the box contained when it was feloniously abstracted from your father's chamber."

"Perhaps he was not one of that gang. Perhaps the box came into his possession accidentally, as it were?"

"Not very likely; I am inclined rather to believe that he was the very person who carried off the box, and probably the watch, and the silver spoon also, which disappeared at the same time. The robbers might have divided the spoil, certainly; but it was hardly worth while to divide such insignificant booty, the risk of retaining it being so great. However, all this will have to be proved."

"Then you counsel me to prosecute?"

"I do not see that you have any alternative. It is a duty which society, as well as other considerations, urge upon you. This man Carridge must be secured; but I am afraid he has had a hint by this time, and will be *non est inventus* when he is 'wanted' by the police. He had already left Wolverham, I think you told me, when you made the discovery?"

"He left for Manchester that same morning; and was to be absent several weeks; at least, that is what he told Mrs. Bratt; but, she said, he was the most uncertain person she ever had to do with; and he might turn up at any hour of any day or night, just when he was least expected."

"Do you think she knows his address, or where a letter would be likely to reach him? As he said he was going to Manchester, it is almost positive that he is gone in quite a different direction: your veritable *mauvais sujet* is seldom or never candid in this respect."

"I believe she does not know where to find him any more than we do. He is an *agent*, she says; but she does not understand what an agent is. She is a grossly ignorant person, and insufferably vulgar; and yet she has her good points. I feel sure that Carridge has kept her entirely in the dark. Though, by the way, she suspected that he had been in some terrible mischief, from his ramblings in an attack of illness during which she nursed him. He spoke continually of some one being righted before he

died, and, when he thought himself alone, she heard him crying on God to forgive him, for he never meant *to do it!*—to kill his victim, his auditor inferred, from other things he said."

"Mrs. Bratt will have to give her evidence on oath. We must lose no time, Mrs. Pettifer."

"But —— but, if Mrs. Bratt is examined, will not my husband's connection with her be discovered? Oh! I know it will! it must all come out; she will never hold her tongue."

"She will be clever if she contrives to hoodwink the counsel for the prosecution. Of course you will have to swear to the box; and you will certainly have to explain how you came to be in the room, and in the house where it had been deposited. Every small incident is turned over and over again in process of cross-examination."

"Then I do not think I will prosecute. Mr. Pettifer would go mad—raving mad—if the secret of his whole life were disclosed. Why, Mr. Salisbury, his first wife, though she knew him to be of comparatively humble origin, never guessed the real truth. And they were ten years and more man and wife."

"The more foolish he! A man who keeps secrets—life secrets—from his wife, is an ass. And the man who is always pretending to be something that he is not, is a knave. Sooner or later, he must come to grief. However, we will make the best of all that, for your sake. It is not criminal to disown disreputable relations, and nothing need be said of the brother who 'enjoys' penal servitude. I will take care that Mrs. Bratt is drilled into revealing as little of the family history as can be managed—for, pardon me, you *must* go into this matter. You *must* bring your father's murderer to justice! He will not be tried for murder, you know; for there is no reason to suppose but that he simply meant to stun his victim. It's dangerous, though, stunning old people of eighty and upwards. Also, you cannot possibly let go loose a professional burglar, one of a gang who have, doubtless, committed many robberies; and there seems very little doubt that this man was of the party who, with your cook for accomplice, planned the attempt which Miss Nora so cleverly defeated. I tell you plainly, if you do not prosecute, the Crown

must and will. You know, Government offered a reward for the discovery of the burglars who committed violence at Salamanca House, on the night of the 18th of October. It is not for you to decide, Mrs. Pettifer; the matter is taken out of your hands."

She sighed heavily. "It is God's will, then," she said; "His will be done. Yes; I acknowledge the hand of an Almighty Power! Take what steps you think best, Mr. Salisbury."

"My first step will be to find Carridge. We shall have to proceed most cautiously, for he is an old hand. I dare say the police know him; he must have got into trouble before; he cannot have escaped up to this time. The public will hear nothing till Carridge is in custody, and committed to take his trial. You will leave the box and the letters with me? And I should like to have your deposition at an early date."

"Very well. Of course the box remains in your keeping; it is safest with you. Shall I appoint next Tuesday for the business—my own business, which I wish transacted without delay?"

"Tuesday will suit me very well. I will then be prepared to receive your instructions as to drawing up your last will and testament, and also I will prepare the draft of Miss Nora's marriage settlement."

For nearly a quarter of an hour after Mrs. Pettifer's departure Mr. Salisbury sat lost in meditation. At length he rose, took down the japanned box which bore the name of Mrs. Sarah Pettifer, and turned over some of its contents. "All right, so far as that goes," he muttered to himself; "but if there was not another will in that box, and if that man Carridge does not know all about it—why, my name is not Thomas Salisbury! I always knew that man Pettifer was a rascal and a sneak. The whole thing will be very awkward for his wife—very! Why could not she stay Sarah Lane? Or, if she must marry, why not bide her time, and join her money to family, worth, and social position? Oh, Sally! Sally! what a simpleton you have been!"

CHAPTER LII.

"QUICUNQUE VULT."

AND once more Nora was at St. Oswald's, and among the friends she loved and trusted; and it was more than two years since she had paid them any lengthened visit. Changes had come to the Rectory, as to "The Woodlands," during that period. Gertrude was engaged to be married; Fanny had developed into a very handsome young woman; and Laura and Herbert were away at their respective schools in London. There was a change, too, in the heads of the family, Nora thought. Mrs. Bethell's sweet face wore a look of care and sadness, and the doctor seemed worn, depressed, and constantly lost in thought; and yet St. Oswald's was fuller than ever. Since that memorable Sunday of "the empty church" the pews had all been let, and the place crowded. There was no more popular preacher in Bradfield than Dr. Bethell; and his people loved him, and, in spite of all sorts of petty, senseless slanders, his name was honoured in the town, and in all the country round about. And all the institutions of St. Oswald's seemed to be prospering exceedingly, and there were very few now who quoted or regretted the good old days of Parson Bunn.

What could it be that lay heavily on Dr. Bethell's heart, and gave to Madge that unwonted expression of secret anxiety? Nora said nothing to Gertrude or to Fanny; for, if they wished her to know, they would surely tell her all about it. And she thought that they, too, must think her altered, for she could not help, even in the midst of conversation, reverting in her own mind to all that had passed during that eventful summer, and especially during the last few days. Her thoughts were sometimes at "The Woodlands" when they ought to have been at St. Oswald's. It was not till quite late on Saturday evening that anything confidential was said on either side; and then things happened in this wise:—

They were all sitting in the pleasant drawing-room where Nora had spent so many happy hours, when Cobb came in with the last delivery of letters. As he handed the salver to Dr. Bethell, who advanced to meet him, he said, respectfully, "You have Miss Lane's letter, sir;" for his master was just proceeding to open the letter in question. "Miss Lane's letter? Surely not!" said the doctor, turning it over again and again, and fumbling for his glasses. "Why! I declare it is! Really, mamma, you are right; I must wear my spectacles always. I am as blind as a buzzard without them; and I saw Stanley's writing, and never thought of his addressing any one but myself in this house. I beg your pardon, my dear. See! I have only made a little slit in the envelope."

Nora took her letter, blushing deeply, and after glancing over the pages, put it in her pocket, saying she would finish it presently.

"Pray, my dear," said Mrs. Bethell, looking up from her knitting, "do not treat us as strangers. I thought you were quite at home here. Ah! you have been too long away. You will fall into the old ways again in a day or two."

"I think, mamma," interposed Gertrude—who had formed her own conclusions some months before—"I think Nora would probably prefer to read her letter at her leisure. You know I like to have mine from Robert all to myself."

"From Robert! Yes, my dear; but you are making Nora quite uncomfortable."

"Am I, Nora?"

"No; I wanted you to know. I was going to tell you last night, when your maid came in. I have no secrets from my best friends; besides, it is not a secret at all, and I only wonder you have not heard of it. The Carvary people have talked of it all this week, I am told."

"Then it is! it is!" exclaimed Fanny, in ecstasy. "I knew it would be! I told Gertrude it must come to pass. Oh, tell us all about it, Nora!"

"There is not much to tell," said Nora, recovering her countenance—"it has all come about in the most simple and natural way."

"What has come about? What is Fanny dancing that

very singular *pas seul* for? Why does Gertie drop her stitches, and kiss Nora, as if she had just arrived from the Antipodes?" said Dr. Bethell, rousing up, and putting aside the letters which had occupied his attention—not so absorbingly, however, but that he had heard nearly all that passed. "Come here, you little puss! No! it is of no use your opening your big, violet eyes at me so piteously. I am going to make you *'fess*. Now, then, what is all this about you and Ernest Stanley, and what have the good Carvary folk had to talk about?"

"Well! you see," said Nora, demurely, keeping her "big, violet eyes," however, fixed on the doctor's feet—"Annie Stanley is going to be married in November, and she thought the cottage would never do without a mistress; and the Carvary sheep wanted a shepherdess; and so, being of an amiable disposition, I consented to relieve Annie of her scruples, and to oblige the people of Carvary."

"And how long have you been engaged, you deceitful monkey? How do you know that we should have harboured you in our rectory, as the future Bishopess of Carvary?"

"We have been engaged since yesterday week. We plighted our troth in the garden under the large sycamore, at precisely five minutes to five o'clock. Am I frank enough, Dr. Bethell? Have I told you all you want to know?"

"No, indeed; I cannot make it out—you speak of the engagement as *un fait accompli;* and yet, Nora, I can scarcely imagine that the powers that be consent! What does *ma tante* say?"

"*Ma tante* is all that is good and kind! Oh! Dr. Bethell, she is so changed! She seems to be living a new life, and striving only to make me happy."

"Has Mr. Pettifer given his consent?"

"It has not been asked," replied Nora, rather loftily;—the sound of Mr. Pettifer's name made her look rather like a dove with ruffled plumage. "Surely, Dr. Bethell, it was not needed?"

"I do not say it was; but your aunt might have insisted on his authority, you know."

"That is past. She does not, cannot, rely on his

judgment as once she did. A great deal has happened that I do not think I ought to talk about, even to you, whom I trust in my heart of hearts; but I must tell you that *ma tante* has found out most extraordinary things. Mr. Pettifer has strange relations—though he said, before their marriage, that excepting a brother, who was abroad, he had not a relative in the world. He is not in any way what he professes to be; and *ma tante* is undeceived."

"I am very sorry for her," said Dr. Bethell, heartily. "I always said—didn't I, Madge?—that there was something *sub rosa* about Pettifer and his belongings. What made him turn tip-top High Church, Nora?"

"Please don't think me uncharitable; but I think it was just the desire for notoriety—the yearning to be somebody of importance. I really do not believe he cares about any of the doctrines held by his party; though I fancy the pomp and ceremonial, and the deference he meets with from infatuated young ladies, are very much to his taste. You see, St. Mildred's was almost empty, and the congregation fell off rapidly after he married *ma tante;* and I think it was a great deal of trouble to him to make his sermons: even clap-trap and pious rhodomontade must become difficult when they are continually required."

"But he has to preach now?" said Fanny.

"Yes, but preaching is not of much account among the Ritualists; the service—or performance, rather—is everything. And really for a man who is in orders, and can't preach, or won't take the trouble to preach, the High Church is a harbour of refuge. It takes very little intellectual power to be a High Church clergyman. The curates seem to be the very silliest young men imaginable. How should they be anything else, with their souls centred on ecclesiastical millinery, intoning, and church decorations generally? As to the preaching, there is not much of it; and anything does, provided certain phrases are used and a few stock dogmas propounded. Now the Evangelicals, though their discourses are chiefly what N. P. Willis calls 'inspiration and water,' must get up a sort of eloquence, and possess a certain flow of words, which take mightily with those who listen to sound rather than to sense. If they don't, they are nowhere. The

Broad Church party must preach intellectually, and their sermons must be able to bear the keen est scrutiny. They need not be so careful as to sound, but they must give their people *sense*, whether they be in the Establishment or out of it; for there is a Broad Church Dissent, I perceive, just as there is a Broad Church Episcopacy."

"You have been studying theology and ecclesiastical polity under the pastor of Carvary, I see, Nora. Am I to put you down as a 'vert?"

"No, Dr. Bethell, because I never belonged to the Church of England as by law established. I was baptized by a Lutheran minister. All the Protestantism—and it was not much—that I witnessed before I came to England was Lutheran. But for papa, who would not allow me to be anything, I think I should have been a Roman Catholic. Of course *ma tante* assumed that I was of her communion; but I could not feel that it was right to take any decisive step; and now I do really think that, if there were no such person as Ernest Stanley in the world, I should still prefer to join the ranks of Nonconformity. Don't be angry, dear friends all; I cannot help it. Even *ma tante* thinks I do right to follow the dictates of my conscience; and all that I have seen and heard of late—all the triumphs of the Anglican party, which will soon be the dominant party—tends to urge me forward in the path I have elected to take. If anybody on earth could keep me in the National Church, it would be yourself, Dr. Bethell; but even you,—though I never saw Mr. Stanley again—could not now hold me in the communion of Episcopacy. I must be *free!*"

"And I, too, Nora! My child, you must have perceived that something weighs heavily on our hearts; we shall have to leave St. Oswald's."

"Oh, Dr. Bethell! and you are doing so much good—leading people into so much truth. Must it be?"

"It must, Nora. I little dreamed how it would end when I came to Bradfield; I little thought how keen a pang it would give me to separate myself from the Church and the people among whom I have laboured. But truth is greater than any visible church, Nora; and God's cause is never served by sophistry."

"Then do you, too, turn Dissenter?"

"Legally and by Act of Parliament—yes. Actually—*no!* On Advent Sunday, God helping me, I shall be a minister of the Free Church of England. I have communicated with my bishop—he knows all about it."

"And he approves?"

"Certainly not. He is shocked, pained, horrified, and cannot understand my reasons for secession. I shall preach the same doctrines as I preach now at St. Oswald's; I shall use nearly the same liturgy; but I shall be *free!* I shall no longer be compelled to lie towards God—to teach that with my lips, in the desk and at the font, which I would not, for all the world can give, proclaim from the pulpit."

"When did you come to this decision?"

"On Trinity Sunday last. One of my curates was away from home, the other was taken suddenly ill, and the whole service, except the lessons, which my churchwarden was good enough to read, fell, of course, upon myself. And before I had realised what was in store for me, I was beginning that atrocious Athanasian Creed. As I had begun it, I had to go through with it; but I vowed to God that I would never more read the '*Quicunque vult*' in public, nor as my creed; for, at the close, I perforce damned myself, since I do *not* believe faithfully that so-called Catholic faith there expounded."

"But, papa," pleaded Gertie, "I dare say thousands, or, to speak within compass, hundreds of clergymen read that same Creed of St. Athanasius, as it is called, without believing it. They read it with certain mental reservations."

"The more shame to them! What would you say, Gertrude, to a business man, or to a professional man, who told the truth *with mental reservations?* Would you be content that your lover should at the marriage-altar utter one vow which in his heart he repudiated and never meant to keep? If the system, which so many good men countenance in religion, were carried into commerce, into every-day life—if 'mental reservation,' which is nothing more nor less than the Popish doctrine of 'Intention,' were not only tolerated, but even applauded—where should we, as a nation, be? How should we have faith in one another? How should we know whether or not in every transaction there was mental reservation? I, for one, do

not believe in pious frauds! I blame no man who, with a clear conscience, can adopt that creed; but I will not accept it myself."

"I have been told that it has been affirmed in Congress that scarcely any of the clergy—the bishops included—receive all the clauses in a literal sense," said Mrs. Bethell. "Bishop Blomfield never read it, and there are many who followed his example. Its compulsory use is, I believe, an innovation of modern times."

"Yes, Madge; and no later than the other day the Ritual Commissioners had the matter under consideration, and twenty out of the twenty-seven recommended that the Creed should no longer be enforced, while the other seven advised some alteration."

"Who did compose the *Quicunque vult*, papa?"

"That cannot be determined; but, whoever it might be, it certainly was *not* Athanasius. The author of it is absolutely unknown; though it has been ascertained that it was compiled from a collection of old MSS., which were not brought together till long after the date commonly ascribed to the origin of the Creed. That, however, has not much to do with the merits of the case. A thing may be old and bad, or old and good; on its own integrity it must stand or fall. Antiquity may give precedence, but it cannot be a law, except to ignorant and superstitious persons. Then, again, what is a creed worth—a creed which is supposed to express the belief of all Christian people—if nine-tenths of those people fail to understand it? '*Take it on trust*,' do you say, Fanny? Then let us go over to Rome at once! If once we begin to receive the articles of our faith on trust; if once we throw aside the responsibilities of personal and individual conviction, where can we expect to end, save in credulous reception of whatever a crafty priesthood may choose to impose upon us? How many persons who join devoutly in that Creed understand its leading clauses? They have repeated it in church all their lives, and they therefore hold it as a sacred thing; but they have no intelligent apprehension of the words they use. They say, 'Neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance'—a most metaphysical distinction, if it be a distinction at all! But how many, out of a thousand people, know what they

say? A creed is supposed to be a part of worship; but worship, to be acceptable to God, must be intelligent. You are told that, unless you hold the Catholic faith—that faith, mind, as represented by one class of men, who certainly were not inspired, or they would not have made such a jumble and jargon of their propositions—and keep it whole—that is, in all its parts—and undefiled (that is, without the smallest mingling of error), you shall *perish everlastingly*. I begin to think, children, that not one man in a million believes in eternal damnation, or it would never be spoken of so glibly, so lightly. It would be bad enough if the penalty of not endorsing the Athanasian Creed were a century of purgatorial suffering—that is enough to make one shudder; but eternal, endless, ceaseless damnation, hell in all its black despair; the devil and all his angels for ever and ever!—oh, it is monstrous! I tell you that Creed, while it confesses God by word of mouth, denies Him in the spirit. Oh! it chokes me with indignation! Our loving, tender Father, who wills the death of no sinner; our God made manifest in the flesh, the Eternal Word, who never founded any system of religion, who taught no dogmas, who enforced no creeds, who said only, 'Come unto Me,' 'Abide in Me'—represented as hurling the children whom He has made into endless perdition for not accepting that against which a truly spiritual mind *must* revolt—for not comprehending the incomprehensible!"

"*Mon cher papa*," said Nora, "spoke much on such subjects in his latter days. And I remember that once I was turning over an old Prayer-book that his mother had given him forty years before, and opened at this creed, which then for the first time I read. He said, 'Trouble not yourself, little one, about that farrago of nonsense; if I believed in it, I would have taught you metaphysics—for, according to that Creed, you must be saved by metaphysics—since it is faith, not credulity, that God requires, and faith must be intelligent to be accounted faith at all. If I accepted that Creed, I should burn the New Testament, and take to polemical divinity and metaphysics.' So I never did say it in the church, and now, I think, I never shall. The people need not say it—it is only the poor, bondaged clergymen who *must!*"

"But *must* you?" said Fanny, earnestly. "You have often left it out, papa, both here and in your London church. May not the reading of it in Divine service be optional?"

"That is what we are trying for, my dear; but we try in vain. A clergyman in this respect is utterly at the mercy of his diocesan: he may for a while evade certain obligations with impunity, but at any time the strong finger of ecclesiastical rule may be laid upon him, and he will be politely requested to infringe on the Rubric no more—well, we know what *that* means! Either one must submit, and stifle one's conscience to the best of one's ability, or one must fight one's bishop, and wrangle out the vexed question before all the world. And these controversies in the Church do more harm to the cause of true religion than its declared enemies could possibly effect."

"If Disestablishment came, you would not feel constrained to quit the Episcopal Church?" asked Nora.

"Certainly not! For then ecclesiastical law—which is now the law of the land—could not bind me. Then, I might do what, as a seceder, I am about to do—preach the everlasting Gospel without let or hindrance, and not preach one Gospel in the pulpit, and another in the desk or at the font. I need no longer affirm that our Lord descended into hell; I need not pray publicly to be delivered from 'sudden death,' which I do not dread, but rather desire; nor from 'eternal damnation,' in which I do not believe. I need not, as I did, not two days since, lie to God and to the congregation there assembled, declaring that the child I have sprinkled with water is '*regenerate*,' and grafted into the body of Christ's Church. I need not acknowledge the Catechism which teaches so much hurtful error. I need no longer endorse the monstrous lie with which that Catechism commences—that I, that you, that all baptized persons were in their baptism made the children of God!—that, being by nature the 'children of wrath,' they are by the sacrament of baptism transformed into the children of grace; nor that the body and blood of Christ our Lord are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper."

"It sounds very much like consubstantiation, which is

not so far removed from transubstantiation as many simple people think," said Mrs. Bethell. "But, my dear, I wish you would tell us, as the conversation has taken this serious turn, and that these girls may clearly understand you, what you hold to be the nature, and the object, and design of our Lord's Supper?"

* "Most people would think that so deep, and so wide, and so awful a question, that it could scarcely be handled in so informal a meeting as ours, but it seems to me that, after all, there is no ordinance of our faith simpler and easier to be understood than that which Christ Himself, the night before He was betrayed, bequeathed to His Church."

"First of all, papa," said Gertrude, "you might briefly define 'a church!'"

"A church is not a building, except in an arbitrary sense. It is not a consecrated place, or an unconsecrated place, *per se*; but it is where two or three are gathered together, or two or three hundred, or two or three thousand, as the case may be. The church may be in a house, in the wilderness, in the caves and fastnesses of the everlasting hills. It is the faithful themselves who compose the church. They may express themselves in divers ways. Their form of worship may be various, their doctrines may differ widely, but they must meet as a devout body of worshippers to pray and to praise in Jesus' name. People talk of consecrated places; I boldly affirm that no bishop, by virtue of his office, *can* consecrate any building, or any piece of ground; but the edifice we call the church, as St. Oswald's, is consecrated by the services which the people of God hold therein. It is the service of prayer and praise which consecrates the place, and not the place which consecrates the service. And it is one of the worst and most harmful superstitions of the Established Church that it refuses to allow its services to be holden in any

* As I hold literary plagiarism of any kind to be detestable, I beg to say most distinctly that I have put into Dr. Bethell's mouth the precise sentiments—occasionally perhaps also the precise words—uttered by the Rev. Capel Molyneux, on the subject of our Lord's Supper, in a sermon preached on Sunday morning, April 6th, 1873, at St. James's Hall, and published three days later in the *Christian World Pulpit*.—E. J. W.

I know full well; but why should we kneel, when it is certainly not according to the example of our Lord and His apostles? Only the Churches of England and of Rome kneel, I believe. The Church of Rome openly adores; the Church of England, in too many cases, openly, as well as covertly.*

"Then, as our Lord took the bread, brake it, and gave it to His disciples, it must evidently have been sent round. And the same with the cup. Afterwards they sang a hymn. I think that the bread and the wine ought to be handed from one to another—there is a superstition in coming up to the communion rails, or to the altar steps, which cannot be too quickly got rid of; together with the notion—born of Romish priestcraft and delusion—that there is any sort of sanctity or blessing connected with the hand of the minister. What is called the 'Consecration Prayer' also helps on the mischief. When that prayer is said the bread and the wine are no more sacred than they were when the bread was still in the loaf, and the wine in the bottle. And to insist that the 'elements'—which are, according to the rubric, consecrated—shall not be carried out of the church, but eaten reverently by 'the priest,' and by such of the communicants as he shall select, is to offer a very strong vantage ground to those who plead that the doctrine of the Real Presence is indeed the doctrine of the Church of England, according to Act of Parliament. As for the canon at the end of the Communion Service, it has become a dead letter, as recent decisions, and the boldest assertions of those in high places, abundantly testify. And now, children, we

* I believe, with Mr. Molyneux, that there are multitudes in the Church of England who have not the least idea of adoration, in connection with the rite. But it is otherwise with many—and the many are yearly and monthly increasing towards a majority. Since the "Bennett judgment," it may be said that the Established Church of England *does* maintain that, "under the veil of bread and wine, or the body and blood of Christ, there is the actual presence of the Lord Jesus Christ." For it has been pronounced by the highest and most competent tribunal *that there is nothing in the articles or formularies of the Church of England to exclude the doctrine!* One can scarcely remain now for Communion in any Church of the Established order—whether High or Low in its tendencies—without witnessing some silent act of *adoration.*

have talked enough; let us pray together that we may be guided into all truth by the Spirit of Truth. And let this be our constant supplication—'*Grant us, O Lord, in this world a knowledge of Thy truth, and in the world to come the life everlasting.*'"

CHAPTER LIII.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

MR. SALISBURY set to work immediately and energetically. As a Government reward had been offered, the affair had naturally become, to some extent, the Government's concern; and, therefore, he went up to town and interviewed the Secretary of State. The result was a visit to Scotland Yard; and a certain individual, famous among the London "detectives," was sent down to Bradfield in order to make secret inquiry, and to confer privately with the superintendent of the local force. And it was agreed on all hands that nothing should be made public till such time as Carridge, the supposed criminal, should be fairly run to earth. Nora's deposition was taken, also Mrs. Pettifer's; but Betsy Bratt, not being considered reliable, was allowed for the present to remain unquestioned; though the police authorities at Wolverham were instructed to keep strict, but unsuspected, watch upon that lady, and upon No. 7, Laburnum Terrace.

Carridge, however, did not return; neither could any clue to his whereabouts be obtained. It seemed only too probable that some one engaged in the business had let slip a careless word, or committed some small indiscretion, which had served to enlighten those who were always on the alert, and who would take swift measures to elude the grasp of the law, and to sound an alarm to any

who might be involved. And so it came to pass that the autumn faded into the winter, and the winter slowly passed away, and, except in the matter of expense, no advance was made, and affairs remained precisely as they were when Sarah placed the old box, which had seemed to betray so much, in Mr. Salisbury's keeping. It need scarcely be said that Mr. Pettifer was left in entire ignorance of his wife's discovery, Mrs. Bratt having passed her word that she would not say a syllable about it till the right time came; and, though she felt terribly aggrieved at having harboured so great an offender, she hoped in her secret soul that Carridge would escape. "For," as she said to Sarah, "it ain't quite respectable to 'ave a cove took up as 'ave lived under yer roof more nor two years; not but what he desurves to enjoy penal suffitude all the same. But burglary with wiolence and manslaughter ain't a nice sort of a hindictment to be mixed up with; and they'll mix me up with it all, and take away my ca*rac*ter, see if they don't, though I'm hinnocent as the child unborn, and 'ad never set heyes on Carridge when the poor old gennleman come to his lamented end! I wonder, now, whether them as gets sent to 'eaven permiskus like, as he were, is pleased when them as has sent 'em there—without so much as 'by'r leave'—gets into trouble through it? But if there's any sort o' folks I hates and downright despises, it's the *perlice!* The very sight of a Bobby is worse to me nor pison any day!"

And, being accredited with these sentiments, it was only prudent to say as little as possible to Mrs. Bratt till her evidence should be legally required.

One day, towards the close of October, Nora being still absent at St. Oswald's, Mrs. Pettifer sat in her morning room, with little Minnie in her arms, and the contents of her work-basket lying tossed hither and thither for that young lady's recreation, when Eastlake knocked at the door, and entered. "A person wishes to see you, ma'am. Shall I say you are engaged?"

"A person! Who? Is it a man or a woman?"

"A woman, ma'am. Wouldn't give her name, though I assured her I never introduced anybody without a name. She only laughed, and said, 'Just you go in to your missis, young man, and say as Old Nurse from Wol-

verham wants to see her. She'll understand you. You'd better go, or it will be the worse for you!' She spoke in a very rude and vulgar way, I assure you, ma'am. She don't look at all poor; but she is very queerly dressed, and she smells of gin—*dreadful*."

The last sentence confirmed Sarah's suspicions—her sister-in-law had come to pay her a visit, and, faithful to her resolve not to compromise her grand relations, she had gone round to the kitchen entrance, and described herself as "Old Nurse."

"Never mind," said Mrs. Pettifer, feeling most uncomfortable under her servant's strictures, and at the same time resenting them; "send the person here."

In another minute, and before Sarah had time to think how Charles would take it, Eastlake once more threw open the door, and in due form announced "Old Nurse, from Wolverham!" Betsy curtseyed low before Eastlake left the room; but as soon as she was left alone with Sarah she stood up in all the dignity of a silk dress, crimson, shot with purple, a shawl—yclept "*Paisley*"—which might have served the patriarch Joseph when he lost his celebrated coat—mock ermine furs, a green velvet bonnet covered with corn flowers, wheat-ears, poppies, and wild roses, with a ruby-throated humming-bird perched over all, and a long, white ostrich feather; innumerable dark-brown ringlets under the bonnet, and an immense green-glass brooch set in massive gilt, which Mrs. Bratt flattered herself would pass for purest, coloured gold, and a real, priceless emerald! Priceless indeed! Had that piece of gay, worthless glass been what Betsy wished it might be taken for, it would have rivalled the wonderful emerald, pawned for six millions of money, about which a marvellous story was once written in the *Cornhill Magazine*. But Betsy was very proud of that brooch, and felt herself every inch a lady when she wore it.

Sarah advanced to meet her cordially, and was at once taken into the embrace of the Paisley shawl, and had her chin scratched by the rough frame of the emerald brooch. Eastlake was quite right about the alcoholic odour he had perceived. It is greatly to be regretted when effusive people indulge in morning potations. But Mrs. Bratt,

not being constitutionally bashful, was soon at home, and chatting with the lady of the house as comfortably as if their acquaintance were by no means recent.

"I said I'd come, Sairey," she said, as she took out the big brooch, and untied her bonnet-strings, and flung back her glossy ringlets; "an' I'm as good as my word, yer see, which I allus was from a gal uppards."

Sarah said something, which she tried to think was true, about being very glad to see her; and Mrs. Bratt replied:—"It's very 'ansome on yer to say so; and you sich a lady, with sich a be-*yu*tiful 'ouse, an' a man-servant, an' everythink so fine! Ain't Charley a lucky lad! Talk about folks bein' born with a silver spoon in their mouths! He must 'ave 'ad a gold 'un in his'n when he come into this 'ere mortial spear; only I didn't see it, when I 'elped the old ooman, as did i'stead o' the doctor, to dress him in the two or three poor bits o' rags we'd got together for him. Think on his a-coming into the world like that; and think what he is *now!* Ah! some people is born to rise, and he's one of 'em, an' he well becomes his grandeur, he do!—he looked like a r'yal prince, in his weddin' toggery, the day that you and him got spliced. I were proud on him, I were; rememb'ring him, as I did, without a shirt to his poor back, or a pair of shoes to his poor feet."

"Come upstairs to my room," interrupted Sarah: "I will ring the nursery bell, and nurse will come to take baby."

"Stop a minnit, and let me look at yer babby. And to think as she's Charley's babby too! An' she's like him; she favours him more nor you, Sairey; she's her daddy's own child, she is—prutty creetur! Bless you, my sweet lamb; come and kiss yer own Aunty Betsy!"

Little Miss Minnie responded to the invitation by making a dash at the fine flowers so temptingly brought within her reach; but, just missing a flaming poppy, she caught hold of Aunt Betsy's false curls, and held them so fast in her tiny grasp that a catastrophe seemed inevitable, and Sarah was greatly disconcerted. Mrs. Bratt did not care; she only cried out, "'Aven't she strength in her little fistes? But just loose her fingers, Sairey, or she'll ruin my nice new front, which I gave twelve and sixpence for last Saturday as ever was!"

It was not easy to get baby to relax her hold; and when she had at last to let go, conquered by superior force, she set up a tremendous shrieking, after the fashion of her kind, and was carried away by nurse, still wailing as she went.

"Ah! she do remind me of her par," said Betsy, as she accompanied Mrs. Pettifer to her bedroom. "My! didn't he storm, and turn black in his face, when he couldn't get that minnit just what he wanted to. Yes, sure; I'll take off my bonnet. Ain't it a bee-yuty? I come to ate a bit o' dinner with yer; I needn't go back to Wolvrum till the six o'clock train. I've got a wench to mind the shop. What time do ye dine? Quality hours, I guess! Four o'clock, p'rhaps?"

"We do not dine till seven, and sometimes half-past seven; but we lunch at two, and I will order it half an hour earlier to-day. I am sure you are hungry, after your journey, Betsy."

"That I are! as 'ungry as an 'unter!"

But Betsy felt extremely disappointed at being put off with what she called a "nunching," her sole idea of lunch being bread and cheese and beer, with a pickled onion by way of relish, or perhaps, on washing-day, a slice of cold meat with a glass of her favourite liquor. She was, for the moment, quite cross, telling herself that she never would have come all the way from Wolverham just for a "snack," if she had known it! She was soon pacified; for Sarah said, "If you will excuse me, I will go and speak to my cook, for I quite forget what we are to have to-day, and as you are come, and cannot perhaps stay to dinner, we must order a hot dish or two."

"I'm quite agreeable," returned Mrs. Bratt, performing her toilet at Sarah's large mirror, restoring her newly-purchased curls to order, and fastening the green brooch in the front of her dress. She thought she looked very nice indeed, "quite tip-top, and fit for any swellish company!" and then she gazed admiringly at the handsome furniture around her, and fell into ecstasies over the full-length glass-panel in Mrs. Pettifer's wardrobe, which showed her own portly figure arrayed, as she verily believed, most splendidly, most genteelly, most fashionably! Her heart beat with pride and satisfaction as she

surveyed her image; and she whispered to herself, "I never thought I was so 'an'some! but ha! fine feathers makes fine birds. Why, I looks the lady to a tee! Sairey isn't 'arf as finely dressed!"

When Mrs. Pettifer came back she offered to show her sister-in-law the house, principally because it would pass away the time before luncheon; and Betsy responded with alacrity. So she went upstairs and downstairs—my lady's chamber she had already examined—her delight increasing at every step, until it reached its climax in Mr. Pettifer's luxurious study, which certainly did him credit, as it contained every possible accessory for ease and comfort, and was, on the whole, very well arranged, and in something more than medium good taste. Betsy fell into raptures on the spot; she even shed tears in the contemplation of her brother's wealth and grandeur. She had not believed that so much pomp and splendour was to be found, except in the Queen's palaces. The grandest room she had ever entered till this auspicious day was Mrs. Fitter's drawing-room over the shop—Mr. Fitter being a small ironmonger in Wolverham—a stuffy little den, about ten or twelve feet square, much resembling a pawnbroker's museum.

"To think that I should live to see this day!" cried Mrs. Bratt, still affected to weeping. "I as nussed 'im an' did for 'im when he were an 'elpless hinfant, an' watched over 'im when he were a growin' lad without enough to ate, nor scarce a rag to cover 'im. Never could I 'ave thought as he'd come to all this honour and glory. The Lord reward you, Sairey, for taking 'im for yer 'usban', when you might 'ave 'ad the 'ighest in the land with sich a fortin'. An' I 'opes he feels how much he's beholden to yer. If he don't I do.' And do he read in all them there books? I didn't think there was so many in the world. And what a table full of drawers, and what a soft sofey, and what a clever thing to 'old his books, so that he mayn't tire his 'ands with them when he lays down!"

A little before two Sarah heard her husband's well-known ring. She and her guest were in the drawing-room. Charles walked straight into the dining-room where Eastlake was laying the table. What would he say, how would he behave, when sister Betsy presented herself? Sarah was uncomfortably nervous; Betsy declared

that for once in her life she felt "quite daunted." The gong sounded, and Mrs. Bratt started from her seat.

"Laws, Sairey! what is that queer din?" she cried. "A *gong*, d'ye say? Well, I never heard a gong afore; it's summat atween a horgan an' a big church-bell. I can't say I like it; it makes me think of battles and murders. Is that to say we're to go in where the nunching is?"

"Yes; take my arm. Charles will be surprised to see you."

"Won't he! I say, Sairey, I do 'ope as he won't turn up crusty and nasty."

Sarah hoped so too; but she had her private fears; and Eastlake would be at his post, ready to wait upon them: it would be extremely awkward. There was no time for reflection; Charles was stamping his feet impatiently on the hearth-rug, and kicking the fire-irons; the next minute the sisters-in-law entered together. Happily Charles was dumbfounded; he could only gaze with wide open mouth and rigid jaw at the wonderful apparition he beheld; and, before he recovered his powers of speech, Betsy had made him a stage curtsey, and addressed him thus:—"I'm 'appy to see yer, Reverent Mr. Pettifer! Your good lady would make me stop to hunching; she said as you'd be mortial sorry to miss yer old nuss, as yer 'aven't seen so long. I come to see the babby—Miss Pettifer, I ought to say."

Charles could only take the cue thus given him, and shake hands with his old nurse patronisingly; but he looked very glum notwithstanding—"just like an amiable thundercloud," Eastlake told his fellow-servants afterwards. And he ate his luncheon sullenly, saying very little to either of the ladies, and grumbling at the hare soup, which was not seasoned to his liking. Betsy declared it was the very nicest thing she had ever tasted, and she drank it greedily, supping it—alas! quite audibly—in large spoonfuls. Eastlake felt almost too much disgusted to wait upon her, though occasionally his master, when lost in thought, supped up his soup, and tea, and other beverages. But "Old Nurse," he decided, fed uncommonly like a pig with a full trough at his disposal!

Blissfully unconscious of adverse criticism, Mrs. Bratt

thoroughly enjoyed her luncheon; her only trouble being her table-napkin, and the presence of Eastlake, which tied her tongue effectually. It was a relief to all when he carried off his tray, and shut the door behind him; and then Betsy, who had drunk several glasses of good wine and gained enough courage thereby, at once took up her parable. "Now, Charley, my lad, isn't thee glad to see me?" she injudiciously inquired. "I come in the back way an' said as I was the old nuss; so yer servants knows nothink. And yer dear wife made me that welcome I could cry when I think of it. Yer never told me what a hamiable lady she were, or I'd 'ave made her acquaintance long afore this; but there, never mind! let bygones be bygones; we're the best of friends now, an' we means to keep sich."

Charles drew himself up consequentially, and, ignoring Betsy's speech, turned to his wife—"Did you *invite* this woman to my table, Mrs. Pettifer?"

Sarah's spirit rose, and she replied, "I did ask your sister to spend the day with us. She is welcome at *my* table!"

"But, as it happens that your table is my table, and as I mean to be master in this house, I desire that you refrain from inviting people you know to be obnoxious to me. Mrs. Bratt would not have dared to come here, unless you had encouraged her. Let it never occur again. And as for *you!*"—turning to Betsy—"words cannot express the astonishment and the disgust with which your presence in this room inspires me! I perfectly understand my wife's motives in bringing you here: she intends to humiliate and to annoy me, and, so far, she has succeeded; but I dare her henceforth to defy me! I shall have a few words to say to her by-and-by, when we are alone—words which, I think, she will not easily forget. Now, Betsy Bratt, if ever you enter this house again, invited or uninvited, I'll give you *in charge*, as sure as you are a living woman!"

"Give me in charge!" screamed Betsy, becoming fearfully irate. "And what for, I should like to know, you ugly sinner, you?"

"For stealing from me, by the aid of your accomplices, bank-notes to the amount of £500."

"He says I stole 'em," said Betsy, turning round, much aggrieved, to Sarah. "Why, I just slipped my 'and in his pocket and took 'em; an' he brought 'em for me, that I might 'old my tongue. He knows he did! But I'll come to *you* next time, sister-law, for it's all your money, and none of his; and, if I was you, I'd keep a tight 'and over it, too. Give me in charge, would he? I only wish he would! And when the magistrate says, 'Prisoner at the bar, what is yer name?' I'll say, out loud, 'Betsy Bratt's my married name, yer honour; but I were born Betsy Pettifer, and the persecutor is my own lawful brother; an' I took 'im when he were a desolate hinfant, and brought 'im up by 'and, and kep' 'im as decent as a little wagrant could be; and hall he 'as, and hall he is, your honour, he owes to me, and I can prove my words.' I'll tell everythink, Charlie—lots as your good lady here don't know, and need never know, if you only behaves yerself like a Christian—which, of course, being a Reverent, yer purfesses yerself to be. I'll tell how you took her in, and married her for her money, when you'd rather have 'ad pretty Miss Norar, as wouldn't 'ave looked at yer. An' I'll tell how you come to marry poor Miss Ruth Mason, and all about them there old days, as I dare say you've pretty nigh forgotten. But I ain't forgotten! I've a memory has 'olds things, all sorts o' things, Charley Pettifer, my lad! and I'll empty it out, *clean out*, for your benefit; and won't I just make Braffle ring again with the story of the Reverent Pettifer! An' now give me in charge, if yer dare! I'm agreeable; I should like the fun. Shall I ring the bell, and tell yer man-servant to go out and fetch in the fust Bobby he finds? eh, Charley Pettifer? Oh! but yer are a mean, miserable chap, an' I'm ashamed to think as you're my own flesh and blood. As for yer unfortunate wife, I bepities her, I does. She'd better 'ave drownded herself in the ca*nell* than 'ave gone into church and got wed to sich as you!"

"To such a vulgar, low-lived tirade, I can, of course, have nothing to say," was all the response Mr. Pettifer vouchsafed.

He was white with passion, and with abject fear as well, for something seemed to whisper to him that the dread secrets of his life were about to be disclosed, and that his

victorious career was well-nigh ended—that the days of mourning were at hand. He was literally incapable of sober speech, for rage had fettered his faculties, and reduced him to a condition almost equivalent to that which is caused by intoxication. And intoxicated he certainly was, though not with wine. He did the best thing he could have done under the circumstances—he arose, with a certain grim air, which he curiously enough supposed to be dignified, and, with his chin in the air, a bottle of Burgundy in one hand, and a wine-glass in the other, he stalked out of the room, banging the door behind him, and, stamping up the stairs, took refuge in his own especial sanctum, the library.

And then Betsy wept bitterly, and wished she were dead, or that she had never come to Bradfield to experience such cruel and base ingratitude. If she had ever read Shakespeare, she would have said that it was "sharper than a serpent's tooth to have a thankless child;" for Charles had always been as a child to her. But, as she had never in her life read a line of Shakespeare, she remarked that "a hongrateful lad or lass as you'd brought up like a mother, cut you up root and branch, and was wuss than stinging-nettles and irritating plasters."

Sarah sincerely pitied her; but she pitied herself still more, bound to this mean, degraded creature, who did not seem to have one spark of honour or generosity in all his nature. Mr. Pettifer had evidently come to the conclusion that it was quite unnecessary any longer to keep up any sort of appearance before his wife. She had found out his treasured secret; and he ground his teeth, and cursed her, as in solitude he thought of the discoveries she had made. Henceforth Sarah was to know the man, who was bone of her bone, and flesh of her flesh, in all his native deformity of character—in all his pitiful, sordid littleness of soul.

Betsy cried herself to sleep on one of Sarah's comfortable silken couches; and when she awoke she said she would go home at once, and Sarah felt it was better not to urge her to stay longer. She only detained her till she had had a cup of tea with "just a few drops of brandy in it;" and then, the carriage having been ordered, she drove with her to the station, and saw her safely

into the train. Driving down to Old Street in so much state almost atoned to Betsy for the sorrows and disappointments of the day. Her spirits revived wonderfully before she said "Good-bye;" and her last words, as they waited for her train, were, "If ever yer wants an 'umble friend, Sairey, come to me, an' I'll go thro' fire and water for yer! Nobody in this world can say as Betsy Bratt was ever hongrateful; and yer 'ave treated me like a lady, an' I sha'n't forget it. Has for *'im*, he's a viper, an' a sneak, an' a raskill—that's what he is, sister-law Sairey! An' you didn't ought to 'ave married 'im; an' he'll come to some bad hend yet. Yer can't take the law on 'im unless he thrashes yer, or goes hoff with another ooman. More's the pity, say I! The world 'll never get right till 'usban's is obligated to obey their wives. Bless ye, Sairey; you're a queen! Good-bye."

CHAPTER LIV.

MR. PETTIFER SPENDS CHRISTMAS IN ROME.

NORA still remained at St. Oswald's. It was better so, since it was obviously inexpedient to bring Mr. Stanley and Mr. Pettifer into collision; and courting under the large sycamore would be inconvenient in the season of chill mists, and rain, and fogs. The subject of Nora's engagement had not yet been mentioned between Mr. and Mrs. Pettifer, whose uncomfortable relations had not been amended by the impromptu visit of Mrs. Bratt. Sarah lived a dull, solitary life, seldom exchanging a word in private with her husband, who began now to absent himself from home, and frequently spent the night at the house in Lark Court. Her little Minnie was her chief solace. The child was healthy and sprightly, and afforded

her disappointed mother the only happiness which, as a married woman, remained to her. And, strange to say, the maternal passion, which had been almost wanting in Sarah at the time of her baby's birth, awoke now in fullest intensity; and it was her joy to devote herself to her daughter, for whose sweet sake she felt even tenderly towards her good-for-nothing husband. It would have been an unspeakable comfort to her to have had Nora with her—for babies, however precious and consolatory, cannot sympathise, and still less give advice—but she had learned, at last, the pure and holy lesson of self-sacrifice, and she would not for worlds have mingled one drop of bitterness in the full cup of blessing which, just now, was filled to overflowing; for Nora and Ernest loved each other very deeply and very strongly, as became a Christian man and woman about to be united for ever in the closest and most sacred bonds.

But Nora was coming home now, very soon; coming home to make final preparations for her own marriage in the week before Christmas, and also to figure as first bridesmaid to Annie Stanley, whose wedding was fixed for an early day in November.

It struck Mr. Pettifer one day that an unusual number of parcels came to the house, some of them directed to Mrs. Pettifer, and some of them to Miss Lane. His wife often drove into town; and several times she took the very great liberty of lunching or dining at St. Oswald's Rectory. Annie Stanley ran in oftener than was desirable; and once Mr. Pettifer came upon them suddenly in the company of a young man, with a yard measure in his hand, and a splendid assortment of rich and delicate-hued silks strewn all about the dining-room. Was Sarah going to make a fool of herself in peach-blossom silk? And why should she take Miss Stanley, of all people, into her counsels?

Mr. Pettifer grew suspicious; he became persuaded that something which had been concealed from him was going to take place, and he puzzled his weak brain to discover what it might be. If he had asked his wife one question he would have been duly answered; but he scorned to speak to Sarah, unless it were absolutely necessary; and so he wondered and wondered, arriving

at all manner of absurd conclusions, yet never catching a glimpse of the true solution of the mystery.

A second time the linendraper's assistant came and departed with his parcels; and Mr. Pettifer, watching him from the door of Eastlake's pantry, felt strongly inclined to kick the unoffending tradesman into the road, but wisely refrained from indulging the amiable inclination, knowing that such a proceeding would be sure to entail unpleasant, not to say injurious, consequences.

"What did that fellow want?" he asked of Eastlake, who just then appeared.

"The young man from Townley's, sir?"

Now, "Townley and Co." were the principal linendrapers and silk mercers, and lacemen, &c., &c., in Midlandshire; and that Mr. Pettifer knew very well, for he had several times accompanied Sarah to their depot, during the halcyon days of courtship and early marriage; and, in his own elegant parlance, he immediately "smelt a rat." It occurred to him that his wife was making Miss Stanley a present of her *trousseau;* and the idea was excessively displeasing. It also dawned upon him that Nora might be about to figure at the wedding which was to take place at the cottage, almost immediately. As you may imagine, Mr. Pettifer was not a man to disdain questioning his servants, so he quickly turned upon Eastlake.

"A young man from Townley's, eh! What does he want here?"

"He has been showing goods to the ladies, I believe, sir. To my mistress and to Miss Stanley."

"Well!"

"That is all I know, sir. I can say no more."

"But I'll make you say more. What do you mean by *goods?*"

"Dresses, sir, woollen and silken fabrics, I heard Miss Fidgin say—lace, and ribbons, and cambric, and all that sort of thing that ladies require when there's going to be a wedding in the family."

"Then you mean to tell me that Mrs. Pettifer is purchasing the wedding outfit?"

"Certainly, sir. Wasn't you aware that Miss Fidgin had been hard at work on the *trusso* for the last month or more?"

Mr. Pettifer did not like to own that he was entirely ignorant of the fact, so he cut short the interview unceremoniously. He never dreamed of showing the smallest courtesy to a "menial," and he had a miserable suspicion that Eastlake despised him, and derided him to the other servants. Seeing no one about upstairs, he peeped into Nora's room, and there, on the bed, lay three elegant silk dresses, and divers other articles of feminine attire. Every chair and every table was covered with some sort of finery. Yes; it must be! Sarah intended to present Annie Stanley, that beggarly heretic's sister, with her wedding outfit. But he would interfere; he would not permit such senseless extravagance, such needless and most objectionable expenditure. Miss Annie should be disappointed, and Mrs. Pettifer baulked. He went down in a most malevolent state of mind, determined to "have it out at once!"

Annie Stanley had gone home; but Fidgin was with her mistress, evidently holding a consultation about a trimming, divers patterns of which still littered the table.

"Send that woman away!" roared Mr. Pettifer, trying to look like Jupiter Tonans. "I wish to speak to you alone."

"Go, Fidgin," said Sarah quietly. Whereupon Fidgin gathered up her shreds of silk and lace and flounced out of the room as only an offended lady's maid can flounce.

"What is the meaning of all this tomfoolery?" asked the reverend gentleman, as soon as the door was closed, and while Fidgin still lingered on the door-mat.

"Sarah looked at him, with a good deal of surprise; she thought he must have taken leave of his senses. "I really do not know to what you refer," she replied.

"What devilry are you and that girl hatching, I want to know?"

"What girl?" demanded Sarah, more and more bewildered. "Is it Fidgin you mean?"

"It's not Fidgin I mean, though I dare say she is doing her share of the mischief. You know well enough who I mean, madam. That minx, Annie Stanley! What does she do here so often?"

"Really, Mr. Pettifer, I think that is my business. However, I do not object to say that she comes at my

request, in Nora's absence, to help me in choosing dresses, and other articles for the *trousseau*."

"I knew it! *I knew it!* You must be mad. I have a great mind to proceed against you for lunacy; you are unfit to manage your own affairs, which after all *are mine*. No, my lady, you don't do it!"

"Don't do what, Charles? I do wish you would speak plainly!"

"I'll speak plainly enough, you wicked, deceitful, undutiful woman! How *dare* you spend my money—for it *is* my money, you know—on that wretched girl, who is no kith or kin to either of us, and a poor, contemptible jackanapes of a Dissenting minister's sister! What has a clergyman's wife—an Anglican clergyman's wife—to do with miserable, lawless, detestable schismatics? But I won't have it, madam. I forbid you to indulge your foolish whim. Not one of these fine things goes to the cottage, mind! I won't have it. Do you hear me? I say I *won't have it!*"

"I hear you, and so do the servants in the kitchen, I should imagine. Charles, if you will be ridiculous, you might be quieter. You are humbling me by this indecent, unaccountable behaviour; but you are also humbling yourself. As to Nora's dresses and things, they will certainly go to the cottage, though not just yet. Say what you will, my money is my own, and I shall spend as much of it upon my niece as I think proper."

"What has your niece to do with it? You won't make Nora a blind; I am not so easily done, I assure you, Mrs. Pettifer. I can see a good way through a milestone, *I can!* Perhaps you didn't think it, but you don't know me yet."

"I am afraid I do not."

"Don't sauce me, now! I'm your husband, and I'll make you bear fear of me. I know what you are up to; you mean to say that the *trusso*—as you call it—is Nora's gift. The dodge won't do! Nora can't pay for her own pocket-handkerchiefs; she's a beggar!"

"Whose *trousseau* are you talking about?"

"Miss Stanley's, of course; you know that well enough, you false, artful cheat!"

"But I have nothing to do with Miss Stanley's wedding-

clothes, except to order a bridesmaid's dress for Nora. Annie's things came down from London; the whole outfit is a present from a very rich aunt she has living at Kensington."

"Then for whom are all those fine things upstairs? What does that rascal of a draper, that counter-jumper, come here for?"

"The draper comes on his lawful business, and he is a very respectable, gentlemanly young man. The things upstairs, and many more which you cannot have seen, are for Nora, of course,—for whom else should they be?"

"What does Nora want with heaps of finery? One would think she was going to be married!"

"And so she is! I thought you knew it. You and I have not spoken on the subject, I am aware; but then we have spoken very little on any subject for many weeks. We made no secret of it; the engagement somehow got abroad, as soon as ever it was made. Nora is to be married in about five weeks; the wedding-day is fixed for Thursday in the week before Christmas."

Mr. Pettifer stood like one transfixed. His jaw fell, he turned very pale—that is to say, of a pale, greenish yellow. "What's that you say?" he gasped. "Nora married in five weeks! You don't mean it?"

"Indeed, I do! She is coming home the day after to-morrow."

"But who will she marry? There must be some man for her to marry, you know!"

"Well, yes! In order to make a marriage, it is necessary that a man as well as a woman should take part in it. Nora is going to marry Mr. Stanley."

"Stanley of Carvary! *She shall not*, by ——!"

"Hush! don't swear; for you cannot help it. She *will* marry Stanley of Carvary!"

"But she shan't! she can't! she *won't!*"

"Who is to prevent her?"

"*Me!*" shrieked Mr. Pettifer, forgetting the grammar he had conned at St. Bees. "I'll forbid the banns!"

"And make yourself the laughing-stock of Bradfield. Mr. Pettifer, you seem determined to render yourself obnoxious. You cannot hinder this marriage, nor delay it one hour; but you can seriously annoy us. Now, I pro-

mise you that, if you do not leave us alone, if you do not behave yourself decently, I will at once take sides with Mrs. Bratt. A word from me will unloose her tongue—and what her tongue is, you know better than I can tell you. If you figure in the local papers I cannot help it. If you force Nora and myself to corroborate your sister's story, it will be your fault—not ours. But you shall not interfere with Nora, nor with me as concerning her. And as now we are speaking of the affair, let me tell you that Mr. Salisbury is preparing the marriage settlements. It is not meet that I—the richest woman in the midland counties—should allow my niece, who but for my marriage would have been my sole heiress, to go empty-handed to her husband. I, therefore, give her as her portion, £20,000."

"I *can* stop that," said Mr. Pettifer, huskily. He was past speaking above his breath now. But his wife assured him that he could not, and referred him to Mr. Salisbury, or to any other lawyer. That half-million was hers absolutely; nothing but the interest thereof could he touch; and he would interfere fruitlessly and to his own discomfiture. And he knew that she spoke truth, though he vowed he would have legal advice, the best the country could afford; he would not trust "that old fool and rascal, Salisbury, who, of course, was in Sarah's pay, and would swear that black was white in her behalf."

Sarah told him he could consult whom he pleased. She wished him to see some lawyer—not Mr. Salisbury—if, indeed, he had any doubts as to her own power over her own property. But he had no such doubts; he had seen a copy of Mr. Lane's will, and he had wit enough to know that not one clause or part of a clause in it could be set aside. Nor could there be any case to bring before any court of law. To dispute that will would be to beat the wind.

He sulked for several days after Nora's return; and then suddenly recovered his temper, and became so agreeable, so complaisant, that the ladies feared the unwonted amiability covered some treacherous design.

Meanwhile Mr. Pettifer went ecclesiastically higher and higher; so high, indeed, that he grew dizzy, contemplating below the green, treacherous swamp of Romanism, which

looked so inviting, as viewed from his airy altitude. And St. Mildred's became a very hotbed of Ritualism, and the church was crowded; and so was the Theatre Royal in Old Street, where Mr. and Mrs. Rousby and a London company were nightly drawing down tremendous applause. The performance at the Theatre Royal was far more imposing, far more legitimate, and far more Christian in its character than that at St. Mildred's. Religious people do not like Sunday pantomimes nor Sunday operas.

"The chief difference between the theatre and St. Mildred's," said Miss Matilda Stampaway, whom Mr. Pettifer had startled into her senses one day, when he was receiving her confession, "is, that in the latter most of the audience take a part in the play, and in the former it does not seem so much like a show as in the latter. If we must have this sort of thing, let us have the reality rather than the imitation."

Mr. Pettifer heard the news of Dr. Bethell's secession with the subdued air of one who listened in sorrow rather than in anger. The bishop forbade the doctor to preach a farewell sermon to his flock; so he published a pamphlet, when, as he said, the House of Bondage was fairly left behind, and the wilderness attained. "But as there is manna, and as there are quails, and water from the Rock, and the tribes of the Lord, and the Pillar of Cloud, and the Pillar of Fire in the wilderness," said Dr. Bethell, "we will go on our way rejoicing."

It was about a fortnight before the wedding, and Sarah and Nora were both wishing that Mr. Pettifer would pay some of his friends a visit, when he came into Sarah's room one morning, and said: "My dear wife, should you mind my being absent on the interesting occasion of our sweet Nora's nuptials? You know I could not conscientiously witness the ceremony at Carvary; nor can I say what would be expected of me afterwards at the breakfast. You would not mind? I thought not! How glad I am that on this point we entirely agree! Now I feel it will be for my soul's good, and for the good of the flock, that I spend my Christmas in Rome. I have arranged with the bishop for an indefinite period of absence. I *may*—I don't say I shall—throw up St. Mildred's; but my soul's health and my body's health both demand my absence

from Bradfield at this crisis. What do you say, my dear Sarah?"

"That I hope the change will do you good. But you cannot speak a word of Italian!"

"Young Barnes will go with me if I undertake to pay his expenses, and, of course, hand him over something by way of honorarium when we part."

"That will do very well. He is accustomed to Continental travelling, and speaks the languages fluently. How much money do you want?"

"It is impossible to say, my love. But if you signed me two or three blank cheques, there could be no difficulty. I could fill them up as the exigencies of the sojourn demanded."

But Sarah was too much of her father's own daughter, too much of a sensible woman—and she was growing more sensible every day, for the companionship of a fool constrains one to be rational—to put her name to unfilled cheques. So she replied: "I will not give you blank cheques; some one might steal them, you know. I will give you a cheque for five hundred pounds, and when you require more you can have it; and I will pay to Mr. Barnes any reasonable sum that you and he may agree upon."

Mr. Pettifer was obliged to be content; though, as he assured his wife, five hundred pounds went but a very little way when the travelling expenses of two people had to be defrayed. "And, of course," he said, "you would not be happy at home unless your husband travelled in all comfort and in good style?"

"Certainly not," she replied; "you shall not be short of money. Travel first-class, and secure first-class accommodation in every case; and I hope you will see all that is to be seen, and thoroughly enjoy yourself."

And so it was settled. And in three days Mr. Pettifer had said "Evensong" for the last time at St. Mildred's; he had kissed his little daughter, and bestowed on Nora his benediction, and embraced his wife, and was on his way Romewards, *viâ* London, Paris, and Marseilles.

And from that day to this he has not returned. Young Barnes and he still wander, making the City on the Seven Hills the centre towards which, from time to time, they

gravitate. He writes to "My own dear wife" whenever he wants money, which is very frequently. St. Mildred's has another incumbent, who is neither too high nor too low; who eschews controversy, and treats Dissenters with that studied politeness, which they who are not content, and do not mean to be content, with a dearly bought liberty and mere toleration, entirely fail to appreciate. Sarah wonders sometimes whether Charles and herself will ever meet again; and little Minnie, who has a great deal to say for herself, talks sometimes of what "papa" will bring her when he comes home. She has not the least idea, poor child, what it feels like to have a real, live papa to love and pet her; but her mother is teaching her to love and trust, and, in her baby-way, to serve the great world-Father, the "dear God," whom she never knew in the days of her own ignorant and overshadowed youth.

CHAPTER LV.

"AS A LITTLE CHILD."

NORA was married, and become, as Laura Bethell declared, "my lady-bishop of Carvary;" and Rhoda—herself engaged to a respectable young gasfitter—became, for the time being, head servant at the cottage. Fidgin and Eastlake, incited doubtless by the good example of their betters, also reached the conclusion to enter into the holy state of matrimony, as soon as they could save money enough to buy a snug little greengrocery business, in the neighbourhood of the Pentangle; and, until that happy consummation could be attained, they remained to serve faithfully their *quasi*-widowed mistress. Sam mourned dreadfully when Rhoda refused him; he fretted himself till, as he assured the cook, he lost two stone in weight, and had to have his coats and waistcoats taken in, some-

thing less than a quarter of a yard! and cook being of a kindly, sympathising nature, naturally did her best to comfort him; and succeeded so well, that he ceased to regret Rhoda, who after all was "only a chit of a girl;" cook owned to being forty, such a nice ripe age!—and, at the same time, he became friendly with the gasfitter, and gave him much valuable information on the subject of 'osses.

And every Sunday Dr. Bethell preached to overflowing congregations; in the first instance in the Town Hall, or the Corn Exchange, or in whatever large room he could manage to secure; and presently in a temporary tabernacle, which is before long to be replaced by a spacious and handsome building—the Bradfield Free Church of England. The ground is bought and paid for; more than two-thirds of the funds required are in the bank; if you go to the right place, the architect, who built John Grey's Jubilee Chapel, will show you a beautiful coloured plan of the intended church. The first stone is not yet laid. If the workmen are dilatory, perhaps by the time the building is completed, *all* the Churches of England may be free and independent of State control. God grant it may be so! We know now that it is only a question of time.

And so the winter passed quietly away, and spring was coming once more to scatter flowers over all the land, and to flood the earth with golden sunshine, when, one morning, Mrs. Pettifer found on her breakfast-table a very dirty and smudgy letter, bearing the Wolverham post-mark. It was from Mrs. Bratt. Carridge had come back to Laburnum Terrace,—come back to die, according to all appearances, and he wanted to see "old Lane's darter, and the young Missis Lionorer." Sarah and Nora lost no time in responding to this summons, and Mr. Salisbury went with them. They found the unhappy man very near his end. He looked ghastly as he sat up in bed, with a bright red spot on each hollow cheek, the sallow skin tightened over the mouth, and hair and brow moist with the clammy perspiration of excessive weakness. Mrs. Bratt had done her best to make him comfortable; and she had sent for a doctor on her own responsibility, and charged him to give the best advice and medicine, and spare no expense, for she would see that he was paid.

But no doctor that ever practised could save poor Tom Carridge from the grave; he was in the last stage of fatal consumption. He might linger a few days, said the medical man; scarcely a week at the utmost; it might be that only a few hours remained to him.

"Then if I mun doy," said he, when left alone with his landlady, "send for them as you knows on. It's too late to hang me now, or to send me over seas, or to make a convick of me. I don't think as they'd care to take me into custody; the prison as I is a-going to is a safe un: there's no breaking out of it. I want 'em to know the truth; and I want to see that pretty lass, as I saw in the churchyard, *righted*. I've kep her out of her own this four year and a-half. If I mun doy, let me make amends furst, then praps God A'mighty will forgive me. If she forgives me I think praps He will. I say, Betsy woman, dost thee believe in what the parsons say? Dost thee think there really is such a place as hell?"

"Of course there is," returned Betsy, confidently. She had her theological opinions, as people of her class generally have, though how she came by them she could not have told. "Yes," she continued, "and I'm afeard you be going there like a fast train, Carridge! Couldn't you repent now? I mind the parson saying it never were too late to repent!"

"It's hard," said Carridge, speaking more to himself than to Betsy; "it's main hard. And yet I should like to know where I'm a-going to. It's all dark—all dark! I wish summun would bring me a light; but I won't have a black-coat telling me as I mun be damned. No, I won't! There's summut about a Saviour, but I can't mind what."

"Yes, you're the gal—the lady—the lass, I mean," he said when he saw Nora. "I see'd you in the churchyard the year after the old man died; and"—turning his hollow eyes on Mrs. Pettifer—"be you Miss Lane, as was old Lane's darter?"

"Yes," she said, "I am Mr. Lane's daughter. Have you anything to tell me?"

"I have a lot to tell yer, Missis Lane; but I've scarce the strength to tell it. Gie me a drop of wine, Betsy; I'm sinking, and I must say what I have to say. Furst, missis, I didn't mean to kill your old father; I swear it as a dying man. I never had no wilful murder on my hands.

Me and my pals—Dick Carter was one of 'em; he's got seven years, so I needn't mind splitting on him. I won't say any other names,—we'd heerd that old Lane had untold riches in his house, for all the world knowed as he were a close-fisted old gentleman; and we planned the burglary. There was four on us. We slipped into the house by the garden, just at dusk, and hided ourselves in the garret that was a sort of lumber-room. We meant to wait till all was a-bed; but Missis Lane there stopped up till very late, and then we thought it would be best to fasten her into the back part of the house, while we tackled the old 'un. When the old fellow saw us he begun to scream out 'Sally! Sally! thieves! thieves!' But we knowed as Sally couldn't get to him. Bless you, he showed fight like a good 'un, and he roared like bulls, and I knew he was a struggling to get to the big 'larm bell; and though he were turrible shaky on his pins, he'd have done it if I hadn't give him just a back-hander to keep him quiet, while we attended to our business. It was all over in a minnit; summut told me he'd got his death-blow, and his blood would be on my head, and I turned sick and queer like, though I ain't one to blench in danger. I'd have fought a bobby as long as I'd breath in me. I'd have fought two to one; but that old man's awful groan, and his ashy face, made me tremble like a leaf. You see I'd never killed nobody before. I dessay you gets used to killing people, as to other things; but I wasn't used. I've never been my own man since the day I heard he were dead.

"Well, then, the big 'larm bell begun, and we knowed as we must cut and run. I snatched up the box that were under the bed. Carter, he took the watch and spoon, and we made off as fast as we could, and not a minnit too soon, for the neighbourhood were all astir at the sound of that cussed bell, which would not stop, and kep getting louder and louder, enough to wake the dead. We all separated. I come right away to Wolv'rum. Two of the gang was taken on suspicion; but nothing could be proved, for no mortal creatur saw any of us, furst or last. That dodge of locking Missis Sally Lane into the kitchen were a good un, weren't it?"

Here Carridge stopped to take breath, and Mr. Salisbury, who was more anxious about the box and its con-

tents than the story of the robbery, which was pretty much as everybody had guessed, asked him why, as a practised burglar, he had not destroyed what might at any time have led to his conviction. After another spoonful of wine, he said:—

"I did mean to burn it, but I could not find the means to do it at once; and then I thought I'd just look over the papers in it. I were very disappointed to find nothink of any value. There was leases, and letters, and old bills, and dockyments of all sorts, of no use at all except to the owner, as advertisements says; but at the very bottom of the box, wrapped up in a piece of old newspaper, was a *will*—old Lane's *last will and testament!* It were signed and witnessed all right, and it give most all he possessed to his only son, Thomas Oldham Lane, of some place in France; and to Thomas Oldham Lane's daughter, Lionorer Lane, after him; and to her heirs for ever.

"I couldn't burn the will! I *couldn't!* I thought the dead would haunt me if I did. I hid it away, though I put all the rest of the papers, except some old letters, in the fire. The will's under my pillow now; I made Betsy Bratt put it there last night. Which of you will take it? It's the young missis's by right, I guess."

Mr. Salisbury took it, and found that it was the very will of the existence of which he had suspicions. The old gentleman had drawn it up himself, copying it, apparently, to a great extent from the one which had made Sarah sole heiress. It was a very curious-looking document, and all but illegible—which was not wonderful, considering that the writer was very nearly blind. How he had contrived to do it at all was a puzzle to every one. But it was a perfectly good will; there was no mistaking the signature; and the witnesses were two persons whom Sarah perfectly remembered coming to the house several months before her father's death.

There was no mistake! It was Nora, not Sarah, who was the real heiress—Sarah had about the "seven hundred a year," which she had once expected to inherit.

"There must be some stupid blunder," said Nora, pushing the scrawly paper away. "I don't believe it is anything but nonsense, and I'll have nothing to do with it. Grandpapa always said you were to have all he pos-

sessed; he wrote it to papa; he said it often to you, *ma tante*, and he said it also to Mr. Salisbury."

"I understand it, though," answered Sarah. "I offended him one day, it was in the summer of that year. It was a very slight and stupid thing—only about his dinner. And I was tired of my hard, dull life, and of his tyranny, and I spoke improperly to him, and he was angered. He said to me, 'Very well, Sally! very well! *you shall pay for this!* I am not going to put up with your impudence any more than with Tom's self-will.' I thought then, he might make another will, leaving his money to the hospital, or to the Blue-coat School; but I forgot all about it. And after a week or two, he seemed all right again, and I fancied he did not remember our little quarrel. We were as good friends as usual up to the night of the robbery; he never said much, and very little passed between us at any time. You know how it was, Mr. Salisbury; no one knew him better than you."

Mr. Salisbury did know him, and was not so astonished as was the rest of the world, when the "last will and testament" was produced. Nora wanted to burn it, but, of course, that could not be allowed; both she and Ernest Stanley felt that the burden of half-a-million of money would be more than they could bear. Sarah took her loss very quietly; she cared little for money now; though she could not help wishing she had never been a rich woman; she would probably never have been Mr. Pettifer's wife, if this will had not been suppressed. "But then," she said, "I should not have had my little Minnie; I should not have learned the lessons my marriage has taught me. I should still be the miserable, cold-hearted, selfish, bigoted Sarah Lane I once was, and whom nobody could love. It is all right, the money and the loss of it were both discipline. I have gained what ten millions could never buy—a knowledge of my God and Father; and a new life has come to me, and now my trust and my joy is in Him. All is well."

But Nora could not bear her aunt to be so impoverished. What was £700 a year to a woman who had been spending some thousands per annum! In August she came of age, and then she, with her husband's fullest concurrence, instructed Mr. Salisbury to draw up a "deed of gift," making over to Mrs. Pettifer one-half of the celebrated

half-million of money. "For," said both Ernest and Nora, "£250,000 is quite enough for us! What in the world shall we do with it!"

I need not say that it was so arranged that Mr. Pettifer should not have the fingering of the money. Mr. Salisbury took especial care of that; it was firmly and safely settled on Sarah and on her daughter Minnie. And so, after all, it was a case of "share and share alike." And everybody was satisfied.

Except Mr. Pettifer!

When he heard of Nora's succession, and of the limited income that remained to his wife, he gnashed his teeth, and made use of—— well, let us say, *most unclerical language!* His brother, who "enjoyed" penal servitude, could scarcely have surpassed him.

It was a great relief when he found that he would be practically as well off as ever; for Sarah had never—in spite of all his extravagances—lived up to even half her income. He might still spend as much as he had ever spent, if Sarah would only continue to supply him liberally. He blessed and anathematised Mr. and Mrs. Stanley in the same breath; blessed them for what he chose to call "restitution," and cursed them because the money was tied up so tightly that he could not get a paltry £5 of it, except through his wife.

Notwithstanding the Wolverham doctor's *dictum*, Carridge lived for several weeks, and Nora and her husband visited him continually. But it was Nora to whom he listened most eagerly. He had wronged her, and she had freely forgiven him; Sarah had forgiven him also, and now he wanted God to forgive him.

Nora found it very difficult to make him understand anything at all about God. "It is worse than talking to an absolute heathen," she said to her husband; "his God is a sort of respectable demon—a slave-driver at the best."

For some days she feared her work was hopeless; at length, repeating to him for the fiftieth time—"God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life"—it seemed as if suddenly the Blessed Spirit touched his heart and opened his eyes, so that he began to comprehend the love of God in Christ—the only true God, Creator, Father, King, and Saviour.

And so he died penitent, yet rejoicing. The last time he saw Nora he said: "The Lord's pardoned me, I know, but I hope He'll let me make up to Him in another life for all the evil I've done in this! I hope there will be some way of doing His will, and doing good instead of harm. His *love* broke my heart, you see, and melted me into a child. P'raps I may begin again as a little child—who knows? But I want Him to see as I am in earnest—as I do long with all my heart to serve Him somehow and anyhow."

The next time Mrs. Stanley paid her visit of mercy, Carridge was dead. Looking on the emaciated face, refined at last by suffering, and by the new spirit that had been born within the dying body, she thought of his words—"Perhaps I may begin again as a little child!" And she knelt down by the still, rigid form, to give thanks for that pardoned soul, which had passed away in hope into the infinite beyond, of which no man knows. But she could only through her tears say the child's prayer—the aged saint's prayer, too—the prayer that our dear Lord, as the Man-Christ, gave us:—"Our Father, who art in Heaven; hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."

CHAPTER LVI.

CONCLUSION.

THERE were changes in Poplar Street. Salamanca House was built out into an immense factory, and the dismal sitting-room, which had once been such a dungeon to Nora, became a covered gateway, through which heavy waggons, and crowds of stalwart, begrimed men, were continually passing. A great, grim engine-house covered what had once been the grass-plot and the herb-beds; the smutty marigolds and the cankered rose-bushes were rooted up and flung away; the spindly poplars had been converted into firewood long before; nothing remained of the old Salamanca House but the actual bricks and mortar,

which, for the most part, were untouched. "Old Lane built queer and ugly, but he built *strong*," said the elder inhabitants of the district, who could remember the gloomy mansion in its more prosperous days.

Sarah and Nora were sitting together one evening in the drawing-room at "The Woodlands," with the children playing about them. Nora had three of her own now, and little Minnie was five years old. They had not long come home, for they had been that morning to take a last look at Salamanca House, before it faded altogether into the shadowy past; but they were too late—the builders had made such rapid progress that little was left for Sarah's last adieux. Then they drove on to Ashford, where, of late years, railway arches had multiplied, and works and factories had wonderfully increased; to say nothing of countless ugly, shabby streets, swarming with dirty women and rude children, and a beershop at every corner. Only the grey, ancient church, and the now crowded graveyard, remained of the old, rural Ashford of Sarah's young days—the Ashford of shady lanes and flowery hedges, and cool, rippling brooklets, and "immemorial elms."

The church was open, and they went in; it used to be a treat to Sarah and her brother Tom to be taken to Ashford Church on Sunday afternoons in summer. St. Oswald's was a rural suburb then, and Ashford was real green, leafy country. And the fine old church was grand as any minster to the children. It was not so much changed, Sarah thought, since those childish days, which seemed so very far away. The old pews were gone, and the deep, low-browed chancel had been "restored;" but the pillars and arches were the same, and the great eastern window, on which the "bloody hand"—the crest of the noble family, who centuries ago had reigned at Ashford Hall—glowed still in deepest ruby amid scrolls and legends of the olden time, and saints, and kings, and martyrs crowned and clothed in purple.

The church was quite empty; the sun came in through the high clerestory windows, and shone aslant the dusty organ-gallery. All was very still and peaceful; it seemed as if one might come in world-worn and weary-laden, and lay down one's burden for a little while, under the shadow of those old walls. "Here my father and mother

were married," said Sarah, going up to the communion-rail; "and here I was confirmed—ah! I forget how many years ago, and I am not so old either. I am only forty-five. Sometimes I think I must be sixty. This is the very spot; I knelt just there, for I remember looking down on that little lozenge-stone, and reading, 'To the memory of Dame Dorothy de Bracy, who died 1654.' I should like to kneel down again in the same place, for I feel as if I shall never visit this old church again."

And she knelt there, and Nora with her. Nora was praying for fresh blessings for herself and for those she loved more than life itself. Sarah was weeping and giving thanks that God had brought her out of the land of Egypt, and out of the House of Bondage, and that the Land of Promise, with its milk and honey, shone fair before her eyes. She was not afraid of death now, for why should she fear to go home to her loving God and Father!

"Good-bye, dear old church," she said, as she paused at the south porch; "something tells me I shall never see you again. No matter. Thank God for a sweet, pleasant memory, and for the life of the world to come."

Afterwards, as the ladies sat, as I said, in "The Woodlands" drawing-room, they began to talk together of these things, and Sarah told Nora much which she had never heard before, of her own strange, lonely, repressed, and saddened youth. When the children were gone away with their nurses, they fell into deeper converse. First they spoke of a change which was close at hand—the Stanleys were going to live in London. It seemed to them that God pointed out to them the path they were to tread. Ernest Stanley had fulfilled the rich promise of his youth; he had become, as the old deacon of Carvary had prophesied, "a leader and commander of the people." He was getting to be what, in these days, we call "a representative man." Now Stanley was a grand preacher, and a deep thinker, but he felt somewhat painfully that the vocation of the *pastor* was not truly his. A church like Carvary needed a true pastor, and it had only an earnest, powerful, eloquent preacher, Public work, too, pressed 'more' closely upon Stanley as the months and years went by. Public questions and public interests occupied him more and more continually. He had less and less time for the duties of visitation; and the Carvary

people, proud as they were of their gifted minister, often grumbled at his frequent and obligatory absences.

"Why don't you go into Parliament?" said Dr. Bethell to him one day, when conflicting duties were harassing him, and he complained sorely of feeling like a shuttlecock. "There are other men who can take your place here; you are one of the very few who *can* fight for us at Westminster. You have courage, sound judgment, keen political instincts, a burning eloquence, which compels men to listen to you, and every year adds to your experience. Go into Parliament, I say; go and strengthen the hands of Miall, and Richard, and Leatham, and help old Bright when he comes back again to hold his own. You may be a preacher of the Gospel just the same, though you can scarcely have a church of your own. In short, I think God calls you to the public service of your country; you will be a hundred times more useful in the House than in the pulpit—though the pulpit and the platform need not be deserted."

Not many weeks afterwards, a seat was offered to Stanley, and he was petitioned on all hands to consent to his immediate candidature. He did consent, and he was elected, though two Conservatives, backed up by all the forces of local Church and State, opposed him. So now he and his wife were going to enter upon a new sphere of life; upon new duties; upon new and untried joys and sorrows, responsibilities and cares; and London was to be their settled home. Sarah stayed at Arleston, for she was knit by the ties of a lifetime to smoky, noisy Bradfield, and she greatly prized Dr. Bethell's ministry. But she is often found at Prince's Gate, where the Stanleys live; and her visits are frequent and prolonged. Nora and Ernest have no more welcome, no more honoured, visitor than "*ma tante.*"

"And I am glad we went to Ashford this morning," said Nora; "to-morrow the packing begins in real, good earnest. I do like that old church; I never was in it before. I wonder if some people would think me only a half-and-half sort of Nonconformist because I like to pray in old churches?"

"I don't see why they should; but there are narrow, bigoted people of all denominations, always will be—or for a long while to come. But I am not the person to

decry bigotry, seeing what a wretched, foolish bigot I was for forty years of my life."

"I don't wonder that you were a bigot; it was the harsh, unloving, stone-cold atmosphere in which you were brought up that made you what you were."

"Yes! certain inherited tendencies, and the teaching of Leo Bunn—ah! he knows better now; long before this he has learned the true Evangel. But tell me, Nora, why you like to pray in old churches? Neither you nor I believe in what is called 'consecration.'"

"Not in prelatical consecration, certainly, *ma tante;* but we do believe in the consecration of centuries of prayer and praise. Where thousands of the dead have knelt and prayed; where hands long mingled with the dust have been clasped in fervent supplication; where lips long silent have tasted of the cup of blessed remembrance—it must be holy ground. I don't think God is any nearer to me there than here; but I like to kneel down where whole generations have knelt before me; and Ernest feels so, too. I said the same thing the other day to Martha Grice, and she could not understand me; 'because,' she urged, 'you Dissenters are trying to pull down the Church, and you will never rest while one stone of it remains upon another—though what you will gain by it I am sure I cannot tell.'"

"Martha is one of those impracticable persons with whom, on certain subjects, it is useless to argue. She taunts me with leaving the Church of my fathers. It is in vain I assure her that I have not deserted the Church, but only the *Establishment;* that I cling to the liturgy and to the time-honoured usages of the Church more tenderly than ever. She will not understand that we, the Free Churches and the Nonconformists—for you know, Nora, I am *not* a Nonconformist, except on political grounds; and I think it very hard that I should be called a Dissenter just because I won't be governed by the State in the one point of religion, which must be between my God and me—she will not, or perhaps cannot, see that our quarrel is not with the Episcopal Church, but with the Establishment, which, as such, we must denounce, and labour to overthrow."

"*Delenda est Carthago!*" said Nora, smiling. "*Ma tante,* Miss Grice *cannot* see. The light only dazzles and

confounds people who have been blindfolded for half a century and more."

"I know how at first the light hurt me, so that I resolutely shut my eyes; I *would not* see. But I had a sort of glimmering idea that Dr. Bethell might be right. How I hated and despised him, to be sure! telling myself that it was for the Gospel's sake that I hated him, that it was in Christ's name I shunned him! I remember, too, how angry I was when he told me, one day, that my faith was not founded on the Bible, but on what I found in the Bible, which I studied with foregone conclusions. I see now that it was precisely as he said."

"What a changing world this is! I suppose it is good that it should so change—good in every point of view. And we ourselves change, and are no longer what we were in the past. Change makes progress, and progress tends to perfection. And it is such a blessing to find the work of one's life."

"And such a joy to feel that God opens one's eyes to see the work, and gives one the strength to do it. And, oh, such a joy to be free of the old bonds and trammels that kept one away from God, and from the clear shining of His face! It is just as if the sun broke through the clouds, and melted all the mists, and turned the harsh eastern blast into balmy southern breezes, and the grey, cold gloom that wrapped earth, and sky, and sea into pure, warm, golden light, making all things beautiful; brightening and sweetening the whole face of Nature, and giving to 'the trivial round, the common task' a grace and dignity they never knew before—which they could never know till the soul, freed from the fetters of slavery, turned to God as manifest in Christ, and saw in Him no cruel, vindictive tyrant, no hard, ruthless judge, but a loving, tender, most pitiful Father, who has willed the salvation—in the widest sense—of all His children, and their true happiness in this life, and in the life or lives which shall be theirs hereafter in the world beyond the grave."

THE END.

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